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New
No.

HONEST HAND,

THE TRAPPER GUIDE:

OR,

THE DEATH-TOUCH OF THE BLACKFEET.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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HONEST HAND, THE TRAPPER GUIDE

CHAPTER I.

THE CARNIVAL OF DEATH.

PUFFING, panting, straining, quivering from stem to stern the gallant little *Metamora* breasted the yellow, muddy-looking flood, a band of foam rolling up before her cutwater, her ragged-looking wheel churning the water into chopping waves that soon settled down into long, regular undulations, their crests marked with a phosphorescent glitter as the combs broke, one after another.

From the open furnace doors streamed a lurid glare, lighting up the bow of the boat with midday distinctness. Upon either side of the bow were planted iron crates, filled with resinous fuel. By this light two stalwart, red-shirted men were casting the lead, their peculiar, long-drawn song—for it can scarcely be called any thing else—sounding like weird music upon the night air.

It was the time of the annual "June rise"—and only those who have lived long upon the treacherous Missouri can tell just what that is—and the river was "booming." The force of its always strong current seemed redoubled; "sucks" and "boils" were scattered thickly over the foam-bearing, drift-wood covered expanse. Nearly all the sandbars had disappeared, covered by the rise.

The *Metamora* had on a full head of steam—the engineer, who knew to a pound what pressure his pet would bear, was coolly feeling the leviathan's pulse, knowing that he could do no more. Any further effort would send them one and all heavenward. And yet the boat barely made headway, for

moments at a time actually no more than holding her own against the swift current.

Yet they one and all knew that this point—White Breast Bend—must be passed before they can “tie up” for the night. To do so below would only invite their destruction. They must tie close to the bank, where they would be entirely at the mercy of the savages who have been following them for so long. Above the Bend there is a broad, quiet eddy, with good holding ground.

Jack Donan, the pilot, well sustains his reputation of being the surest pilot of the upper Missouri. Any other man would have lost ground. Jack gains it—though slowly. Captain Varney, with an oath of delight at a neat move of Donan’s, declares that Jack must have a drink on the strength of that, and leaves the pilot-house to see that the horn is manufactured correctly.

Upon what slight events does one’s life hinge!

The hurricane deck was almost deserted. Two shadowy figures, standing closely side by side, appeared to be watching the huge ungainly wheel that so violently thrashed the waters behind the *Metamora*, casting a shower of spray high into the air. And had the light of the twinkling stars been bright enough one could have seen a strong arm wound tenderly around the trim, shapely waist, and one tiny hand half hidden in another broader, firmer palm.

Captain Varney smiled broadly, and chuckled significantly as he recognized Harle Manning and Edna Allen.

“Jest like two blessed turtle doves!”

Captain Paul Varney stole on tiptoe to the ladder. Though his day was past, he had not forgotten how very annoying it is to be interrupted in one’s billing and cooing.

Other eyes were upon the lovers—eyes far less friendly than those of the captain. A figure crouched beside the upturned yawl that lay on deck, and as the captain vanished a man uprose and shook a clenched hand toward the unconscious dreamers. An evil light filled his eyes, even in the gloom of night, and one hand settled upon the horn haft of a keen-pointed, double-edged knife half hidden in his breast. And then, with the noiseless tread of the velvet-footed panther, he glided forward. But not toward the lovers.

Jack Donan's mind and senses were fully occupied by the task before him. If he heard the stealthy footstep as the shadow glided in through the open sliding-door, he gave no evidence of it. Possibly he thought it was the captain returning. Bending far forward, his brawny hands grasping the spokes, his eyes striving to pierce the gloom beyond the circle of light cast by the crates, he listened to the sing-song cries of the leadsmen.

The shadow straightened up behind him, and the red glare of the torches below shone full upon the bared blade as it was poised for an instant above the doomed man's head. Then, swift, deadly, with irresistible force the weapon descended, driven with all the force of a muscular arm, tearing its way through the pilot's brawny neck until the crimsoned point appeared at the murdered man's throat.

A convulsive start and quiver that tore the handle from the assassin's grasp, a horrible, gurgling, choking groan, and then the body of poor Jack Donan fell heavily to the platform. His trick at the wheel was over—he was off duty forever.

The assassin, as though confident in his aim, never gave his victim a second glance, but clutched the wheel with his blood-stained hands, and with one piercing glance ahead, allowed the spokes to fly swiftly around for a moment. One of the leadsmen gave a sharp cry of wondering warning, but it was still hot on his lips when he was hurled violently overboard.

With a sudden shock that caused the smoke-stack to creak and sway ominously, that snapped the stout tackle supporting the spars like packthread, sending the massive sticks far out into the water, that hurled both crew and passengers from their feet—the doomed *Metamora* ran aground.

Instantly all was confusion. The cries of the terrified—the groans and curses of the injured, were intensified by the plunging and desperate struggles of the cattle on board. But high above it all rose a single yell—loud, shrill and prolonged as the note of a bugle.

And then—the air seems laden with answering yells. Some on board have heard similar sounds before; others can easily guess their meaning. *It is the cry of blood!*

Though he had run the *Metamora* fast aground, the work of the assassin did not appear concluded, for, leaving the now useless wheel, he sprung quickly out upon the hurricane-deck, his face turned toward the stern, where, but a few moments before, the lovers had been standing.

The shock had cast them both violently to the deck, and his keen eyes detected them struggling to arise. With a low, grating cry he darted forward and dealt the young man a brutal kick upon the side of the head that hurled him, quivering, a dozen feet away. And then the assassin's arms closed round the form of Edna Allen, his eyes glowing with an unholy fire, his every nerve tingling with an almost insane delight, as he pressed the bewildered maiden to his broad, heaving chest.

Then, as if remembering that his foul work was but half done, he uttered a long-drawn, clear cry that could be heard for miles. And almost immediately the answer came from the shore. That answer was the significant war-whoop of the Kainna Blackfeet.

"Injuns, by the 'tarnal!" screamed old Jesse Roberts, who had lived by trap and trigger for half a century past. "Look to y'ar weepens, boys, or we're gone beavers! We cain't *puckachee*, so we must fight!"

Ben Gilkey, the engineer, was thrown violently against the walking-beam, but instantly sprung forward and stopped the machinery. Then, distinguishing old Jesse's words, he caught up an ax and left the room to act his part in the threatened struggle.

A few others were equally prompt, recovering their presence of mind and clutching such weapons as lay nearest to hand, some of the crew arming themselves with capstan-bars and sticks of cordwood. But the majority seemed panic-stricken, running aimlessly to and fro, adding to the confusion by their incoherent shouts. They needed the voice and presence of a recognized leader. The first mate had been crushed by the falling spars. The captain had been flung down the stairs upon his head, and lay there beside the guards insensible.

"Unkiver the cannon, some o' you fellers—lively, thar!" yelled Jesse Roberts. "Durn y'ur hides, be ye deaf? Cain't

ye lend a han' ? Yender comes the varmints like a swarm o' ho'nets !"

The little howitzer was uncovered, slewed around, and its muzzle depressed until it covered the shadowy mass of rapidly advancing canoes. And then, as a live coal was applied, a bellowing report sent its sullen echoes for miles through the broken hills.

From out the vail of flame-tinged smoke there came a series of horrible yells and screams. The heavy load of bullets and bits of iron had carried death to nearly a dozen of the Blackfeet, wounding others, and destroying several of the frail bark canoes. But the defenders were not given time to reload the weapon. The Blackfeet sprung out into the waist-deep water and tore forward with the yells of half-famished wild beasts, maddened by the scent of fresh blood.

"Sock it to 'em !" screamed old Jesse, emptying his rifle into the oncoming mass. "Knock 'em back—don't let 'em git foothold or we're played fer keeps !"

"Show that you're white men, boys !" thundered Ben Gilkey, as with his ax he cut down the foremost Indian who was trying to spring aboard. "If we must go under, better do it in style—a coward dies twice when a man dies once."

By this time the majority had recovered their presence of mind, and nobly seconded their leaders, using their rude weapons with terrible effect. The Blackfeet had attempted to enter at the bows, as that was the only open space along the boat, and the water was shallower there. But the deck was now some three feet or more above the water, as, under full headway, the boat had run upon the bar until the hull was almost out of water.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with "mountain steamers," I add that the *Metamora*, stern-wheel, when laden, drew eighteen inches, being but little more than a flat-boat, roofed and decked.

Ranged side by side along the bulwarks, the white men, both crew and passengers, plied their weapons with arms nerved by desperation. Whenever the heavy bars or cord-wood sticks fell, death was almost sure to follow, and more than one Indian was carried off by the swiftly-flowing water, almost headless, with skull shattered like an egg-shell. Nor

did the defenders escape unscathed. Some of the cooler or more prudent Indians stood back and plied their bows with telling effect. Others, while climbing to the guards, dealt savage blows and vicious thrusts with hatchet and knife. When one of the defenders fell, dead or disabled, it left a gap that his comrades could imperfectly fill. On the other hand, two Blackfeet pressed forward to take the place of each fallen brave.

It was a horrible struggle—a duel to the death, with all the chances on one side. Victory for the whites seemed impossible. Yet they fought on with unflinching determination, with a persistency worthy a happier fate, yielding, not to the living foes, but to death alone.

But the end was nigh.

There were cool heads among the Blackfeet—old warriors who had proven their courage and daring on many a hotly-contested battle-field, as well as upon the single trail. Unlike the young and ambitious savages, who pressed forward without even attempting to guard themselves, the veterans it was who thinned the ranks of the defenders. And a number of them quietly passed down-stream, keeping sheltered beneath the flaring hull until they gained the waist, where there was no enemy to oppose their entrance.

In this manner fully a dozen warriors gained the boat without the loss of a man, and then, gliding past the engine-room, they charged furiously down upon the devoted whites, who had their hands full with beating back the other savages.

With the triumphant yells of the Blackfeet came their blows. Full half of the defenders were stricken down from behind before they could realize this new peril. And then, surrounded, terribly outnumbered, nearly all of the survivors lost heart, a stupefying terror taking the place of the stern desperation that had filled their hearts and nerved their arms. They no longer strove to beat back the foe who were climbing upon deck. They fell almost unresisting victims beneath the blood-dripping weapons of the Blackfeet. A few of them begged for quarter. As well attempt to whistle down the raging tornado. Even if understood, their words found no echo in the hearts of the Blood Indians. It was a ruthless, pitiless massacre.

There were at least two exceptions. Old Jesse Roberts, who had shattered his rifle-butt over a plumed crest and then plied the gory barrel with arms that seemed to have regained all the vigor of their past youth, whirled quickly around, and nimbly dodging the blow that was leveled at his head, returned the compliment with interest, thrusting his heavy rifle barrel against the pit of the Blackfoot's stomach, hurling him back, gasping, almost senseless. And then the iron tube whizzed through the air, alighting with crushing force upon the neck of a huge warrior, whose body was hurled from deck into the river, while his spirit took up the long, last trail.

But this was the trapper's last stroke in that fight. The impetus of his blow carried him forward a pace, full into the arms of an Indian, whose aim was suddenly frustrated. Instead of cleaving the old man's skull with his keen tomahawk, his arm struck heavily upon Roberts' shoulder, while the weapon, torn from his grasp by the shock, fell clattering to the deck.

Instinctively grappling with each other as they fell, the antagonists rolled swiftly over and over, each striving to gain the mastery, snarling and biting like a couple of wild beasts locked in a grapple that could end only in death. For a moment they were checked by the low timbers that edged the deck. Then, still locked in a tight embrace, they overbalanced, and fell, with a sullen splash, into the shallow but swiftly-flowing water. An indistinct splashing, a choking, gurgling sound, and then they were both swept down into deep water, still struggling viciously.

Ben Gilkey, whose powerful arm and long, keen-edged ax had been the greatest barrier to the attacking Blackfeet, also escaped the first rush of the flanking party. Though he saw that all was lost—that nothing short of a miracle could save them now, his stout heart did not fail him. He was a man, to the very core.

Wielding the heavy ax with the regularity and power of a machine, he kept a space cleared around him as he slowly retired toward the flagstaff at the vessel's bow. His brawny arms and hairy chest were spattered thick with blood; his big black eyes shone like living coals from out the tangled,

bushy forest of hair; his breath came quick and hot, while an occasional snarl of rage told how deeply his worst passions were aroused.

The Blackfeet uttered an involuntary cry of wondering admiration, not unmixed with awe, as they fell back a pace from the raging Hercules. Warriors themselves, they were not slow to recognize *a man*, and, despite the number of braves who had fallen by his hands, had the engineer then asked for quarter, he would undoubtedly have received it.

But such a thought never once entered the brain of Gilkey. The fierce, deadly struggle had changed him from a quiet, almost stolid man, to a wild beast whose thirst for blood was to be quenched only by death.

As he saw the enemy falter in their attack and fall back, leaving him breathing-space, the Hercules glared around as if selecting his next victim. Then, with a deep, roaring yell, he leaped forward. The heavy ax fell full upon the head of an Indian. Flesh and bones gave way like tissue-paper before a flame. Down sunk the steel, pausing only when buried deep in the warrior's chest. It was the stroke of a giant.

But the fury of the Hercules proved disastrous to himself. As he strove to extricate the weapon, his foot slipped and he fell heavily upon the blood-stained deck. A dozen braves flung themselves upon him, cutting, thrusting, hacking with knives and hatchets in blind fury, quite as often piercing red skin as white.

Then they arose. A mangled mass lay upon the deck. It was the remains of Ben Gilkey, now beyond recognition of even his dearest friend.

This was nearly the end of the massacre. A few of the whites had succeeded in breaking through the enemy's ranks as they pressed after Ben Gilkey, and sought safety in hiding, ostrich-like, with much the same result. The savages scattered and overran the captured vessel like a swarm of angry ants, peering into every nook and cranny, prying into the piles of goods and freight. An occasional yell of triumph, mingled with groans of terror, announced a capture. And shortly after four trembling, craven wretches were dragged unresistingly toward the light cast out by the engine fire.

Then a devilish chorus of yells announced a new phase in that revolting tragedy.

The red-hot engine doors were flung open. The captives were dragged forward. Blood-curdling shrieks and groans told that the cruel knife was doing its work. Not of death—of mutilation. The captives were scalped alive—and then—*roasted!* Despite their frantic struggles they were lifted up and thrust head-foremost into the roaring, crackling furnaces. Yet perhaps theirs was the easiest death. One breath, then all was ended.

The Blackfeet thrust the charred bodies further in, using the cordwood. Then they crammed the furnaces full of fuel, that even the bones of their victims might be consumed.

A simultaneous exclamation of terror, abruptly changed to a yell of delight. The engines began to clank and labor the steam to puff from the 'scape-pipes. Some of the Indians, in curiously fingering the bright knobs and bars, had unwittingly set the machinery in motion.

It was glorious, because novel, sport!

CHAPTER II.

THE SPOILER AND HIS PRIZE.

THE one who had opened this dire tragedy—the man whose too sure hand had driven cold steel through Jack Donnan's neck, acted like one whose plans had been carefully and thoroughly arranged. As already stated, he leaped out of the pilot-house as soon as the *Metamora* ran aground, and caught the prostrate figure of Edna Allen in his arms, at the same time knocking Harle Manning violently back. For a moment it seemed as though he was about to repeat his cowardly blow, but then, as the bewildered maiden began to struggle as though to free herself from his close embrace, he placed one palm over her lips, and turning, glided to the guards, uttering a long, peculiar cry. As soon as his signal was answered from the shore, the assassin crouched down

beside the low guards and dextrously wound a large silk handkerchief around Edna's head. Though her breathing was not seriously obstructed, it was impossible for her to utter a cry loud enough to rise above the dire confusion and uproar that reigned below.

"Now if Oolooteka does not forget—if he makes no mistake, this will be the capsheaf to my career!" he muttered, as he drew and cocked a revolver.

Rapidly descending to the cabin deck, he passed noiselessly along until the back ladder was gained. Descending this, he paused close to the edge of the boat, peering eagerly out upon the water. He could just distinguish the advancing canoes, and knew that another minute would inaugurate the carnival of blood.

"Hist! be quiet!" he muttered in Edna's ear, as she began to struggle with reviving consciousness. "Don't you see the Indians are coming? If they hear you, we are both lost. Keep quiet, and I will save you from them yet!"

The shrill yells of the savages, the sullen explosion of the howitzer, the hoarse cheers of the white men—all mingled together in one thrilling chorus—lent force to his speech. Yet the maiden's form quivered and thrilled with a strong repugnance, almost of loathing, mingled with fear, such as one feels when meeting a venomous serpent. She recognized the voice. It was that of Arthur Watkins, the ex-Indian agent.

"See!" he added, exultantly, "yonder comes a trusty friend. I knew he would not desert us. But not a word—not a sound, as you hope to meet your father again in this world! Be prudent, and I will save you; but if the Indians once discover us, nothing under heaven can save us!"

A small canoe was rapidly nearing the point of the boat where Watkins crouched, containing one Indian, who handled the paddle with rare skill. And as the traitor uttered a faint whistle, he urged the bark canoe alongside, holding it steady with one hand upon the low rail.

A few hastily-uttered words passed between the two men, as Watkins lowered Edna to the bottom of the canoe. Then, following her, he grasped the paddle as the savage sprung upon the *Metamora*.

Had Edna's eyes been uncovered, her vague suspicions of the Indian agent's honesty must have been confirmed. He did not attempt to steal away, but paddled boldly out from the boat, passing near some of the savages who were still struggling in the swift though shallow water that covered the bar, and she would have seen that he was recognized by the fierce, paint-bedaubed warriors.

But she lay quietly in the bottom of the boat, half dead with terror. The frightful uproar was enough to have frightened far stronger nerves than hers. The Blackfeet had just reached the bow of the doomed *Metamora*, and the death duel was raging furiously.

"I didn't think the fools would make much of a fight!" mused the traitor, with a backward glance at the weird tableau thrown into strong relief by the blazing cratesful of tar-coated fuel. "I'd rather be here than there—but Oolooteka will soon settle them. He is a perfect demon for blood—equal to that enigma the Blackfeet call the *Death-Touch*."

As the canoe touched shore, Watkins sprung out, raising Edna in his arms. With some little difficulty he clambered up the crumbling bank, then paused for breath beside a ragged boulder. As he set Edna upon her feet, she tore the bandage from her eyes with a quick motion. A low, gasping cry of horror parted her lips as her gaze fell upon the lighted death-grapple out upon the river.

"It is awful," said Watkins in a low tone that, despite his caution, had a cadence of triumph. "They are doomed—nothing can save them now. And only for my friend, you and I must have shared their fate."

"Your friend—and one of *those* demons!"

"No, no, you wrong us both. He is an Indian, I admit, but not a Blackfoot. He was in my employ for years, and now acts as hunter and scout for your father at Fort Union. I saw his signal of danger yesterday, on shore—you know I warned the captain that there were Indians about. He knew that I was aboard, and as soon as I heard the alarm, I felt sure he would come to lend us what assistance he could."

"It may be so—I can't think connectedly, with *that* horrible sight before my eyes," faintly replied Edna. "But what are we to do? If our friends are murdered—"

"They are doomed, beyond all hope!"

"Better then have left me there to share their fate—'twould be over now. What is the use of struggling against fate? I am weak—timid—what is there for me in this wild region, but death?" despondently added Edna, covering her eyes and sinking to the ground.

"There is life and safety, at least," quickly replied Watkins. "I am strong, well armed, and I know the country well. I will conduct you in safety to your father, or lay down my life in the attempt."

"I ought to be thankful—grateful for your words—but—I can not tell why—I am afraid of you," faltered Edna.

"Afraid of me!" echoed Watkins, uneasily.

"Yes, I can not help it. I shudder and turn cold whenever I meet your eyes, or pass near you. Perhaps it is prejudice. You know what terrible stories are told about you—"

"Infernal lies, rather!" grated the Indian agent, fiercely, his eyes glowing wickedly.

"I do not deny it. I only know what I have heard and what my feelings are. And now—leave me, I pray you. You say you know the country—then save yourself. I am afraid of you. Every word I speak to you, almost chokes me. Go—in mercy's name, leave me!"

"Leave you—are you crazy, girl?"

"Not yet—but I would soon be that or worse, if you remained near me. There is something evil in your eyes—something that seems to fascinate me, even while my soul is filled with horror and abhorrence. Go—if you have one spark of manhood left, leave me!"

Edna, crouching upon the ground, shrunk away from the tall, dark man, a look of unutterable horror in her widely distended eyes, her face ghastly pale. It really seemed as though she had spoken no more than the truth when saying that the Indian agent's glowing eyes fascinated her against her will. Though filled with a strange longing to flee, she was utterly powerless. Her words were uttered in a low, even tone strangely at variance with their purport. And the glowing eyes held hers in close subjection.

But then the frightful chorus from the boat that had for a moment temporarily lulled, broke out afresh. It was when

the flanking party of the Blackfeet made their decisive rush. The tumult appeared to break the curious spell. Edna sprung to her feet. Watkins adroitly caught hold of her wrists, as he said :

“Silly girl, I have sworn to save you, and I will make my oath good whether you consent or not. If you will go with me quietly and sensibly, well and good. If not—then I'll have to carry you. Is that plain enough?”

For answer Edna, with a sudden, adroit twist freed her hands and turned to flee, forgetting all else in the intense horror with which this man inspired her. But the attempt was in vain. With one agile bound Watkins was beside her, and flinging an arm around her waist, lifted her clear of the ground. A single piercing shriek burst from Edna's lips, and then she swooned.

“Hellow thar! who'n thunder's 'busin' a pettycoat?”

A voice deep, rumbling, sonorous yet subdued, came from out the gloom of a bush near by, accompanied by a faint rustling sound as though the speaker was advancing. The voice was unmistakably that of a white man.

A fierce, grating curse hissed through the renegade's clenched teeth as he swiftly turned toward the point from whence the sound proceeded, and his free hand deftly drew a revolver from his belt and cocked it. With almost the same motion he discharged two shots into the rustling bush, then leaped lightly back behind the boulder, as if expecting the charge of an enemy.

Again there came a faint rustling of stiff grass and half dried twigs; but this time it was mingled with a low, sighing moan. Then all was still.

The renegade chuckled grimly. He felt that his shots had not been wasted. His curiosity was excited as to what it was that had so boldly challenged him, but as Edna hung heavily upon his arm, he remembered that he had several miles yet to travel before he could feel assured that his prize was safely caged. And so, with the white face resting quietly against his breast, he glided on through the night, passing over the broken ground with an ease and celerity that spoke highly for his woodcraft.

For over a mile he glided silently on, then paused beside a

small brook and sprinkled Edna's face plentifully with the cold water. She had already given evidence of returning consciousness, and this sharp remedy speedily restored her. Then, as soon as he thought she could understand him, Watkins said :

"You see now, my dear, that I am determined to have my own way, whether or no. If you are foolish enough to give up your chance of life without a struggle, I am selfish enough to save one who has grown very dear to me, even against her own will."

"I—dear to you—I don't understand," faltered Edna, brushing the moisture from her brow.

"I will speak plainer, then. As well play with faced cards from this on ; 'twill save trouble. Not long since you spoke of something in my eyes that frightened you. And yet it should not, since you have encountered love glances often enough without flinching. There—I have you fast. You must listen to me now. Or wait. On one condition I will keep silence. If you solemnly promise to marry me within one month after I return you to your father's arms, I will say no more until then. Think of it well. I give you life and freedom, return you to your friends ; something that no other person can or could do. Only for me, you would have been murdered on the boat. And what do I ask in return ? That I may be allowed to serve you through life—to be your watchful, faithful slave, whose only thought will be to give you pleasure. Is it too much ?"

"It is too much. You know that what you ask can never be."

"You are thinking of him—of Harle Manning," sneered Watkins, bitterly. "But that is past. He is dead—killed by the Blackfeet from whom I rescued you."

"God in His mercy grant that you are mistaken ! But, if it is true, then while I live 'twill be as his heart's widow."

"Then you refuse my terms ?"

"If you call them terms—yes," was the quiet reply.

"Very well—don't say that I did not give you chance. If you dislike what follows, remember that you have only yourself to blame," muttered Watkins, choking with rage.

"I begged you before to leave me, but you refused."

"As I do now! Bah! do you take me for a silly, puling fool because I tried my hand at a little sentiment? Leave you? Not much! From this on, our life-trail runs together. You are mine—there are none to dispute my claim. From this night you are dead to all the world but me. Your lover's scalp is hanging to the girdle of some Blackfoot brave before this. Your father will believe you died with the rest of those who took passage aboard the *Metamora*. And then—but there. I am losing time. I can talk while traveling. I have work to do yet to-night. I mean to leave you with a couple of squaws—the wives of the friend who kindly loaned us his canoe to escape from the Blackfeet with, you know. Then I return to the boat to see that my work is done up in style."

Arthur Watkins never knew what a great influence that closing speech had over his life. He raised Edna in his arms and resumed his course. The maiden made no resistance. She knew that it would be in vain, and she feared to further anger the renegade. And she felt that strange, indescribable influence again stealing over her.

While striding along, Watkins talked volubly, almost without cessation. He seemed like one under the influence of strong liquors, or else one whose brain was slightly cracked. A portion of his talk is here condensed, because it is necessary to a proper understanding of this tale.

Arthur Watkins had been an Indian agent, trader and speculator for years. Joshua Allen, as a rival in more ways than one, had been his inveterate opponent. Honesty, uprightness and courage had worsted cunning and trickery. But the last and bitterest blow was when Allen, though then a widower, forty years old, had won the heart of a beautiful half-breed girl whom Watkins had long sought to possess. Less than a year afterward, she was found just outside the fort, murdered. Watkins was suspected, but nothing could be proven against him, and after being flogged, he was driven from the post.

Ever since her sixth year, Edna had been at school in St. Joseph, Mo., at the Convent of the Sacred Heart. Twelve years later, when she was eighteen, her father sent for her. The messenger was one of his most trusted men, young Harry Manning, who had often acted as bearer of messages between

father and daughter. They took passage on board the *Metamora*, a stern-wheel mountain-boat. Arthur Watkins, through his spies, had learned this, and dogged Harle, taking passage on the same boat. His allies were on the lookout for him, and he found it an easy matter to communicate with them by signs and by messages scratched upon bits of bark, which were either left at wood-stations, or else sent down the current. White Breast Bend was the point selected for the attempt. How it succeeded, the reader already knows.

Though Watkins had not seen Edna since she was a little child, and had entered upon the foul task with the one idea of taking a bitter revenge on Allen, he was deeply struck with the maiden's beauty, and before a third of the long journey was over, a wild passion filled his heart. He resolved that Edna should be reserved for himself, instead of being turned over to Oolooteka, as at first intended. This would be a bitter blow to the trader, and, with the loss of his goods—for the *Metamora* was loaded almost entirely with Allen's property—would about square their accounts. So reasoned Arthur Watkins.

Entering a narrow, fertile valley nestling between two high hills or rather ranges, Watkins hastened along it for nearly half a mile, then paused before what seemed to be a solid cliff, rising nearly perpendicularly for fifty feet without a break or crevice, a belt of luxuriant bushes growing at its base. Facing these bushes he uttered a sharp whistle, then the peculiar cry of the spotted night-hawk. Almost immediately the last signal was repeated, apparently from the heart of the cliff. And then, as if satisfied, Watkins parted the bushes and disappeared with Edna.

Scarce five minutes elapsed ere he reappeared, but now his arms were empty. He had left Edna Allen behind him. Evidently this was the "snug nest" of which he had spoken as the retreat of Oolooteka, the outcast.

Tightening the belt around his waist, the renegade broke into a long swinging stride, a sort of half-run that covers ground with an almost marvelous degree of speed and ease. He had taken the back track, was on his return to the ill-fated *Metamora* to, as he had told Edna, make sure that his work was thoroughly done.

When he had covered two-thirds of the distance, he paused, with a startled exclamation. A peculiar sound came to his ears, borne by the favoring wind.

"It's from the Metamora's 'scape-pipes. What the devil can have happened? Surely they can't—"

But the thought was too wild to be entertained even for a moment. The whites could not possibly have defeated his red-skins. But who could have started the engines? And for what? He knew that the boat was too firmly grounded to be removed without the aid of the spars and tackle. Nor was it to their interest that the prize should be set afloat.

Perplexed and uneasy, Watkins resumed his trail with increased speed, and soon reached the river-bank. A single glance showed him the situation of affairs.

The boat was still aground, crowded with yelling, laughing savages, intoxicated with their complete success quite as much as with the whisky they had scented out and broken into. From the quick, heavy puffs of steam issuing from the 'scape-pipes, and the unusually rapid revolutions of the huge wheel at the stern, Watkins knew that there was a heavy press of steam on.

"Curses on the drunken idiots!" he gritted, as he took in the scene. "They'll blow the old scow up and ruin every thing!"

Raising his voice he shouted aloud a few words in the Blackfoot tongue, as he looked in vain for the canoe he had left with prow resting upon the bank. The confusion and uproar on board was almost immediately lulled, and in a few minutes more a canoe, paddled by a couple of savages, left the boat and rapidly approached the spot where the white chief was standing.

Oolooteka, in answer to the angry questions of Watkins, sullenly replied that the machinery had set itself in motion, and that none of them knew how to stop it. As for the fire-water, the Blackfeet had earned the right to drink their fill, since all the pale-faces had fallen by their strong arms. Oolooteka, half drunk, was an altogether different being from Oolooteka sober. And the renegade had the good sense to recognize this fact.

Leaping upon the Metamora, Watkins at once rushed into

the engine-rooms, where he found a dozen half-drunken savages dividing their time between a headless whisky-barrel and the furnaces, now drinking, then shoving in a stick of cordwood to see the mighty heat lick it up. Two mangled bodies lay in front of the furnaces, and Watkins was just in time to see one of them cast into the fire, while the savages yelled and danced around in devilish glee.

Brushing past his fiendish allies, the renegade eagerly searched for the means of letting off the steam. But he was hopelessly puzzled. He had not been allowed to enter the engine-room, for Ben Gilkey had taken a settled dislike to the dark passenger with whose name rumor had been so busy. By dint of close watching, Watkins had learned how the wheel must be turned in order to send the boat's head around suddenly, and that was all he thought necessary.

Fearing to handle the machinery lest he should precipitate the catastrophe he dreaded, Watkins left the room and closely questioned the Blackfeet as to the fate of Harle Manning. All agreed that he had been killed—that not one of the pale-faces escaped. Oolooteka said that he had scalped the young man with his own hand, and produced the trophy as evidence. As all the bodies save one—that of an old man—had been cast into the furnaces, Watkins was forced to be content with this.

His alarm increasing at the convulsive throbbing and laboring of the boat, he ordered the Indians to remove the plunder as rapidly as possible, setting the example by filling his canoe and paddling it over to the shore.

But he did not return. Though no coward, he did not care about taking a trip skyward just then.

CHAPTER III.

HONEST HAND ON THE TRAIL.

"THAR'S a boat comin' up the drink, by thunder!"

These words were uttered by a tall, sinewy, rawboned man, some six hours before the reader was introduced aboard the *Metamora*. The sun was yet an hour above the horizon, giving evidence of a clear, cloudless night to follow.

As this person will be brought forward more or less prominently in the scenes of this history, a few words in description may not come amiss. He was above the average height of men, and could look down on any man who stood less than six feet in his moccasins. His frame seemed loosely put together, giving him an awkward, ungainly, almost clumsy look when in repose. Yet there were few among the savage tribes, or their scarcely more civilized rivals, the trappers and fur-traders of the Missouri Bluffs, who were this man's equal in feats of skill, strength and agility. For more than thirty years his life had been passed in the wilderness, with, perhaps, an occasional visit to "St. Louey" or Independence, to let off long-accumulated steam in a grand spree.

He had served under General Ashley, Fitzpatrick, Bill Sublette and Joseph Robidoux, besides trapping on his own hook for years. In every position he had so faithfully served his employer, had so conscientiously discharged his duties, that his real name gradually faded from the memory of his comrades, who universally adopted the *sobriquet* bestowed upon the trapper by a friendly Crow chief—HONEST HAND.

As he uttered the exclamation that heads this chapter, a look of intense disgust overspread the rugged, homely features of Honest Hand, and he tugged uneasily at the long, grizzled beard that reached nearly to his waist.

"Durned ef I kin see why them pesky, onnatural things was ever 'vented. Make noise enough to skeer all the game t'other side o' nowhars, to say nothin' about it's bein' contrary to natun' fer a human critter to set water afire jest to

shove a boat up-stream 'ithout his havin' to use the paddles. Reckon they'll git to eatin' by steam afore long."

Honest Hand listened intently to the faint, almost imperceptible sounds that had caught his quick ear. He knew that it was the 'scape-pipes of some steamboat, beyond the high bluffs, and thus guided, his keen eye soon detected a delicate, feathery cobweb of smoke, mingling with the white, fleecy clouds.

"Reckon it's the boat they was talkin' 'bout at the post. Must be slow work, the river's so boomin' full, but if they kin pass White Breast Bend, they're all right. Thunder! I clean forgot—*that* cl'ars up the trail!"

There was a sudden change in the veteran's demeanor. From the listless grumbler, he sprung up into a wide-awake, thoroughly aroused partisan, his eyes glowing, every nerve aquiver.

"Sure's shootin' Oolooteka's a'ter that boat! I couldn't make out why he was hangin' 'round hyar so long fer, wi' all his or'nary gang o' cutthroats an' runogates, since thar's no huntin' wuth speakin' of. Mebbe he's heard o' the goods Cap'n Josh is expectin'. Sich a haul 'd set the varmint up fer life, outcast an' degraded as he is. To-night 'll be his last chainece, ef that is his trail; an' wuss luck! thar hain't a meaner place on the whole river then White Breast Bend when the flood's on. It's thar he'll strike, if a-tall."

Honest Hand said no more, audibly, but renewed making preparations for leaving the spot. Parting a thick bush, he revealed a small niche in the rocks from which he took a small package of dried meat and a flask. Then holding his rifle in the hollow of his left arm, in readiness for instant use, he cautiously descended the steep slope, his keen eyes roving restlessly in every direction, as though expecting to behold some deadly enemy lurking near. On the preceding day, he had been discovered by a party of Blackfeet Indians, and only escaped them by swiftness of foot, though they followed him long and closely, until darkness lent its friendly cover to his escape. As his rifle had spoken twice—and Honest Hand was a man who rarely burnt powder in vain—he knew that the savages would not abandon their hopes of revenge very easily.

Honest Hand, knowing as he did all the crooks and turns of the "Big Muddy," felt confident that the danger, if his surmise was right regarding Oolooteka's plans, to the boat would be greatest at White Breast Bend, resolved to strike the river at that point in time to warn those aboard the steamer, even if he failed to join them in person. The nature of the country, rough and broken, full of high cliffs and deep canons, forced him to make a wide detour, and only for the river being so high and its current unusually strong, he could not possibly have accomplished the task in time. As it was he would probably have succeeded, only for one fact. He was forced to hide himself and lie quiet for a full half hour.

A number of Indians were slowly winding up the valley below, their horses jaded as though from a long, arduous ride. Not a little to the trapper's chagrin the party drew rein at the little stream and dismounting, allowed their animals to drink and crop the rich grass. When Honest Hand first discovered them, as they rounded the point, he was half-way down the hill, so he was forced to lie quiet. Any attempt at retreat or advance was out of the question. Outlined against the white rocks, his dark figure could not but be discovered by the Indians.

The minutes dragged by slowly enough, and it seemed an age before the savages once more bestrode their animals and proceeded on their way. Honest Hand lost no time in leaving his covert, but he found that the delay would prove fatal to his hopes. And though he strained every muscle to its utmost, risking his life freely by desperate leaps as he took "short cuts," he was just too late. While yet half a mile distant he heard the wild yells, the heavy boom of the howitzer, and knew that Oolooteka, the outcast, had attacked the boat.

The trapper's first impulse was to dash forward and take a white man's part in the struggle, and Honest Hand rapidly neared the river bank. But as he found that, from the sounds of conflict, the boat was some distance from shore, he slackened his pace. As he believed the party of mounted Indians he had seen were connected with Oolooteka in this project, he naturally reasoned that the animals would not be

left alone without a guard. If he hoped to be of any service to his friends, he must pass these savages unobserved.

As he rapidly, yet noiselessly advanced, this belief of Honest Hand's was strengthened by the indistinct murmur of human voices. Gliding still nearer, he was startled by an appeal that could only emanate from the lips of a woman—and that woman one of his own race. Though Honest Hand little suspected it at the time, it was the daughter of his old captain, Joshua Allen, begging the ex-trader Watkins to leave her to her fate. Then came the retort, the attempt at flight and the slight struggle, when Honest Hand could not suppress the exclamation that so startled Watkins.

"Hellow, thar ! who 'n thunder's 'busin' a pettycoat?"

When Watkins replied with a couple of revolver bullets, Honest Hand realized that he had made a mistake. This man who was so prompt at burning powder was either one of the home guards, or a fugitive who had by some means escaped from the steamboat. In either case the trapper's hastiness would be almost sure to bring the enemy upon him. If the one, to aid this comrade, if the other, to investigate.

Uttering a low moan as though death-stricken, Honest Hand adroitly crawled away from the bush, and lay close under a large rock, listening keenly, one hand upon his revolver. For a moment all was still in his immediate vicinity; nothing could be heard save the sounds of the death struggle that still raged upon the *Metamora*.

Then he distinguished a faint, cat-like footstep, and braced his muscles for a struggle; but he soon realized his mistake. The sound died away in the distance, instead of advancing.

"A durned fool as ever was!" disgustedly muttered the veteran, as he slipped out from his covert. "That feller 'must 'a' kem from the boat an' tuk me fer a Injan, or he wouldn't 'a' sneaked off like this. Got a woman wi' him, too. Shell I or shain't I?"

Honest Hand glanced out toward the *Metamora*, whose bow was so plainly lighted up. The struggle was still raging furiously, but his experience told him that the end was nigh—that the Indians could not be defeated. His single arm could avail nothing, and the attempt would only cost him his life.

I'll foller these folks—they'll need help afore they git out o' this scrape. The he-critter's too sot headed to take a woman safe through sech a trail. Just 's soon plug a feller 'e not—don't stop to ax is he fri'nd or inemy. Sech fool critters didn't ought to be let run loose 'thout a muzzle."

Honest Hand's keen ear had detected the direction taken by the parties he had resolved to assist, and with one more regretful glance toward the doomed whites aboard the *Metamora*, he glided stealthily away from the river bank. Though almost positive that the man who had fired at him had escaped from the steamboat with his companion, in some manner, the trapper acted as though he was shadowing an enemy. He did not care about being made a target for revolver practice, when he was unable to return the compliment.

Knowing the lay of the ground so thoroughly, Honest Hand anticipated an easy task, but he soon found he had his hands full. Though he caught a glimpse of the couple he was shadowing, within a few hundred yards of the river-bank, the trapper, drilled as he was, had no little difficulty in keeping within ear-shot of his game, without running the risk of betraying himself.

"'Tain't no greenhorn, whoever he is. Knows the lay like a mice! Picks out the best trail like he made it himself; who'n thunder kin he be, anyhow?"

There is something peculiarly interesting in being pitted against a skilled antagonist, and Honest Hand felt a growing pleasure in his novel task of trailing a friend—for such he had no doubt he was doing. And so adroit was he that Watkins, himself a thorough scout, never once suspected that he was being followed.

Honest Hand was close in his rear when the ex-agent halted at the little brook, and he stealthily crawled near, intending to reveal himself before the other could possibly mistake him for an enemy. But the words of Watkins, addressed to Edna Allen, caused him to hesitate.

Every word that passed between them, was overheard by Honest Hand, who was not long in arriving at the truth, knowing as he did the deep rivalry that had for years existed between his old captain and Arthur Watkins. It was not

likely that the ex-agent would run such risk as he tried to make Edna believe, for the child of his enemy.

"He'll show his true colors afore long—then *won't* I jest more'n bounce 'im!" mused the veteran.

Arthur Watkins was never nearer his earthly reward than at the moment when he told Edna he intended leaving her in charge of Oolooteka's squaws while he returned to see that the Metamora affair was properly wound up. The rifle of Honest Hand was leveled, the silver drop covering the traitor's head as he sat in the starlight, and the extra weight of a feather would have ended the renegade's plottings forever. But as he spoke, Honest Hand gently lowered his weapon; he believed he could kill two birds with one stone.

For years past the death-hunt had been sworn between Honest Hand and Oolooteka. For weeks and months at a time they had sought each other's lives, yet, something had always prevented their meeting. Honest Hand had several times believed he had his enemy safe, only to lose him as often, always near one point. Search as he might, he could not connect the broken trail. It was as though the outcast chief had vanished in mid air.

In hopes then, of discovering what had so long puzzled him, Honest Hand refrained from punishing the renegade, and followed close upon his heels with the patience, skill and certainty of a bloodhound. And when Watkins paused before the rock cliff and uttered his signal, Honest Hand was not ten yards behind him.

"A cave—what a durned gumphead I've bin!" he muttered, as the signal was returned, and Watkins disappeared through the bushes that lined the cliff-base.

Honest Hand was not kept long in suspense, for a few minutes later Watkins reappeared and strode swiftly away, taking the back trail. Though he passed within two yards of the trapper as he crouched beside the dense bush, Watkins failed to observe any thing suspicious; fortunately for himself. Honest Hand was ready with drawn knife and a discovery would have been the renegade's death warrant. As it was—partly through fear of alarming those within the hidden home, partly because he felt a natural repugnance to staining his hand with the blood of a white man, even of one

whose treachery so richly merited punishment as the ex-agent—Honest Hand allowed the man to pass his ambush unscathed.

"Now what?" muttered Honest Hand, as the echo of Watkins' footsteps died away; and he scratched his head with a dubious air. "The gal's in thar an' I must git her away: the trail's plain a-plenty so far. But *how*? He told her it wasn't nobody but a couple o' squaws in yonder. But the scetch a or'nary cuss d ruther lie then tell the truth. Be jes my luck 'f thar was a dozen big buck Injuns layin' in thar ready to lift my pelt. Then he hed to give a signal—that shows a body cain't git in 'thout bein' seed or heard. 'Twon't do to wait—ef old Oolooteka comes back, I'll hev my hands full 'thout thinkin' o' *her*. Old man, you got you'self in a nice box!"

But the scout did not hesitate long. Though prudent, when occasion demanded no man living would risk his life more recklessly than Honest Hand. And, though not knowing what odds he might be called upon to meet, at a disadvantage, too, he determined to rescue Edna Allen if it lay in the power of mortal man. His regard, almost love, for his old commander forbade the idea of deserting his friend's child in her hour of need.

After looking carefully to his weapons, and holding a knife in one hand and revolver cocked in the other, Honest Hand slouched his hat and glided up to the bushes. Uttering the signal he had heard Watkins give, it was promptly answered from within. Then, though feeling a curious tingling sensation creeping over him, Honest Hand parted the bushes.

All was dark. As he extended one arm it touched the edge of a rock, apparently he was standing at the entrance of a cave. But where the occupants? Why did not they light?

A faint footstep came to the scout's ear from the vacancy beyond, and fearing lest his figure, outlined against the less opaque sky beyond, should betray him, he stepped forward and allowed the bushes to close behind him, holding his weapons ready for use.

"Who is it?" demanded a low, not unmusical voice, in the Kainna Blackfoot dialect.

Though not perfect in the lingo, Honest Hand understood it well enough to carry on a conversation, as a white man and imitating Watkins' voice, he replied :

"It is I. I returned so soon because I forgot to tell the white squaw something. Where is she?"

"In the lodge, where you left her," was the reply, in a tone of slight surprise. "Mateo is watching her."

"Lead on, then. Got something in my eye, and I can't see well," muttered Honest Hand.

His acute sense of hearing now stood him in good stead. He was guided by the soft shuffling of the squaw's moccasined feet upon the flinty floor, for eyesight availed him little here. But he was thoroughly puzzled. What did the squaw mean by lodge? What need of a lodge in a dry, airy cave? Luckily he was not long kept in suspense.

A faint glow began to dissipate the intense gloom before them, and to his surprise Honest Hand could distinguish the shape of bushes and small trees. Surely this was a strange cavern!

But he was forced to choke down his curiosity for the moment. He could plainly distinguish the form of the young squaw who was unconsciously leading an enemy into her husband's stronghold, and knew that she could scarcely fail to detect the imposition the moment she turned her head, since the red glare of the camp-fire shone full upon him. Then she would give the alarm. At all risks that must be avoided.

Quietly slipping his weapons into his belt, Honest Hand reached forward and closed his sinewy fingers around the woman's bare throat. So adroitly was this done that she had not time to utter a single sound. And then, tightening his grasp, Honest Hand drew the squaw further back into the shadow, despite her convulsive struggles.

Then, as her efforts gradually grew less strong, the trapper loosened his grasp, for he was not a man to shed blood simply because he could do so with impunity. Satisfied that she could not utter a sound, he gently lowered the squaw to the floor, and cutting a portion from her dress, adroitly bound and gagged her. Then, after placing his captive in a little niche, he glided toward the entrance—or rather place of exit.

for he now saw that he had passed through a mere tunnel instead of a cave.

The retreat of Oolooteka was a peculiar one—a curious freak of nature. Surrounded on all sides by towering hills and cliffs of rock, nestled a miniature valley, oblong in shape, comprising perhaps half a dozen acres in all. A mountain goat could scarcely have escaped from the valley, save by the route Honest Hand had followed. This passage was the work of nature, slightly improved by man. Oolooteka, when degraded and cast out of his tribe for a horrible crime that need not be further mentioned in this connection, had stumbled upon this novel retreat, while trailing a wounded bear. Noticing a small hole extending beyond the bear's den, through which he could distinguish daylight, the outcast chipped away the rock until he could pass through. A scene of marvelous beauty burst upon him. The trees were in full foliage, filled with hundreds of feathered songsters. A spring gushed from beneath a huge rock, forming a tiny lake bordered with soft, velvety grass and moss. A careful inspection convinced him that this was the first human foot that had ever trodden there. There was no way of reaching or leaving the valley, save through the den, for the almost perpendicular rocks could not be scaled. And from that day this was Oolooteka's home.

Peering forth Honest Hand distinguished a rude skin lodge. Before this was built a fire. Beside the fire crouched two figures. One was a middle-aged squaw; the other a lad of perhaps a dozen years of age. Look carefully as he might, there was no one else to be seen, and Honest Hand finally came to the conclusion that Watkins had spoken the truth in saying that he would leave Edna in charge of the squaw.

At any rate he must run the risk, and holding a cocked revolver, the scout glided rapidly up to the fire. When the squaw looked up, it was only to see a black muzzle staring her in the face.

"Keep quiet and I'll not hurt you," uttered Honest Hand, in a stern though low voice, using the Kainna dialect. "But if you utter a single sound, I will kill you both."

"Who are you, and what is it you want?" quietly asked the squaw, never flinching from the leveled pistol.

"If you are Oolooteka's squaw, you have heard him speak of a man your people call Honest Hand. I am he; I come for the white squaw that a white renegade left with you just now. If you give me no trouble, Oolooteka will find all well when he returns; if not, then the Outcast will have to look for another squaw to cook his meat and keep his lodge. Is that your boy—brave?" he suddenly added, as the lad stealthily increased his distance from the fire, edging toward the bushes.

"He is the son of a chief," and the woman's lips quivered.

"Bid him keep close to your side, then. A warrior does not like to strike squaws and papposes, if he can help it, but I have sworn that I will take the pale squaw safe to the lodge of her father."

At a word from his mother the lad returned to her side, though sullenly. He was a perfect wolf-cub, far older than his years. By this time Honest Hand was convinced that there were no others in the valley who were likely to give him trouble, and he proceeded with less ceremony, being naturally eager to place a safe distance behind him before the Indians or Watkins could return.

Bluntly telling them that any resistance on their part would be punished by instant death, he replaced his revolver, and holding his knife ready to fulfill his threat, bound them hand and foot with strips cut from the squaw's clothes. Then he approached the tent.

As he lifted the door-flap, Edna glanced up with fear in her face. But Honest Hand quietly uttered:

"Don't be skeered, Miss; I'm a fri'nd who means you well. I'm come to take you home, ef you'll trust to sech a rough lookin' varmint."

"I don't know you—"

"But I do you. You're the da'ter o' my old boss, Joshu Allen, at Fort Union. He sent young Harle Manning to St. Joe fer you. You kem on the Metamora—until the Injuns tuck it. Then a white red-skin, Watkins, brung you hyar. I saw you was in a diffikilty, an' follered you. You must 'a' heard me ax what was up, when you screamed; then he shot at, but missed me. I trailed him hyar, an' now, ef you're ready, we'll take up the trail to'ard home."

"You look honest—you wouldn't deceive me?"

"True as thar's a God above, I'm your fri'nd, little one," earnestly replied Honest Hand.

"I will—I do believe you," impulsively cried Edna, grasping his hand. "Come—let us go, I can't breath in this terrible place!"

After a glance to assure himself that his captives were securely bound, Honest Hand led Edna through the tunnel. As they passed through the bushes, both started. A peculiar sound came to their ears. A dull, rumbling sound, like that of a distant explosion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST OF THE METAMORA.

HARLE MANNING had scarcely time to realize that the *Metamora* had run aground, when the foot of Watkins struck him with terrible force upon the side of the head, rolling him over and over until he lay against the low guards like one dead. Nor did he recover his senses until the traitor had left the boat with Edna Allen.

Bewildered, his brain dizzy, the young man partially arose. It seemed as though bedlam had broken loose. Yells, shrieks, curses and groans were mingled with the sharp clash of steel and the dull, heavy thud of less keen weapons. There could be no mistaking the cause—he knew that the boat was attacked by Indians. And Edna?

This remembrance served to arouse him even more than the startling discovery. He sprung to his feet and glanced eagerly around. He knew that Edna had been leaning upon his arm when the shock of the boat striking cast them to the deck. Surely she must still be near; he little dreamed how many precious minutes he had passed in unconsciousness.

Half distracted, Harle called aloud on Edna, until the maiden's name was echoed back from the shore. He ran hastily over the narrow deck. A dark shape in the pilot-house caught his eye, but as his hand rested upon something

warm, sticky and clotted, he drew back with an involuntary cry. He had touched the corpse of the murdered pilot.

At this moment Manning's cries were answered, and as he sprung out of the pilot-house, he distinguished two figures just springing up the port ladder. There could be no mistaking them. The wild yells, the lithe, almost nude forms plainly proclaimed them savages.

The massacre was nearly ended below. A few of the pale faces had broken through the cordon of savages, and sought safety in flight. These two savages had been seeking for their victims when Manning's cries directed them to the hurricane deck.

By this time Manning was convinced that Edna was no longer on deck, and he was just dashing for the ladder when the Indians arose before him. Distracted as he was, the young borderer was not a man to aimlessly throw away his life, and his stern training stood him in good stead here.

Quick as thought he drew a revolver and flung forward his arm, firing at the instant the weapon reached a level. A sharp report—a flash—a half-stifled yell of mortal agony; and then the foremost savage fell headlong to the deck, shot through the heart.

Neither party had slackened their speed in the least, on discovering the other, and when Manning fired, he was within ten feet of the Indian. Before he could cock the pistol or check himself, the young borderer came into violent collision with the second Blackfoot, disturbing his aim so that the keen hatchet instead of cleaving his skull, barely grazed his cheek, cutting a slight gash in his back as the slender handle was snapped in twain across his shoulder. Grappling, the antagonists stood over the still quivering body of the stricken red skin, straining every muscle in the endeavor to cast the other to the deck. They seemed very equally matched, in size, weight and strength, and it was doubtful which would conquer.

Then, just as he threw his whole power into the effort, Harle's toe slipped in the running blood and he plunged heavily forward, carrying the Blackfoot backward to the deck. Though somewhat shocked, neither was injured, and they fought like mad beasts, biting, scratching, kicking and

snarling as they rolled over and over until abruptly brought up by the low guards at the stern of the boat.

With every muscle tasked to its utmost, the panting antagonists slowly rose to their knees, each striving to cast the other over the rail, down upon the huge wheel below. Inch by inch they bent over the rail, lower and lower—then with a simultaneous cry, they both toppled over and fell heavily upon the wheel.

The double cry was echoed back by half a dozen voices as a number of Blackfeet scrambled upon the hurricane deck. The yells, the pistol-shot and the confused sounds of the death-grapple had been heard, and the savages had naturally hastened to have a finger in the pie. But they were just an instant too late to catch a glimpse of the falling antagonists.

They discovered the dead body of the Blackfoot shot by Manning, and then scattered with vindictive yells to avenge their comrade's death. The body of Jack Donan was found and quickly scalped; but that was all. Though they peered eagerly down upon the great wheel through whose lower buckets the swift water rushed with a sullen roar, they could see nothing. Then the devilish yells from the lower deck attracted their attention, and forgetting all else, they hastened down to enjoy and participate in the second act of the tragedy.

Harle Manning had had a double escape from death, though at the time he did not know it. Even as they fell from deck, the antagonists turned over in the air, and when they struck upon the wheel, the Blackfoot was undermost. Falling across the edge of one of the stout "buckets," his back was broken by the weight of the white man, added to his fall. For a moment they balanced there, then topple over, Manning clutching desperately at the wet, slimy timber. The crippled, senseless Indian slipped through into the water and was swiftly whirled down-stream, food for the fishes. Harle Manning fell across an iron bar, his forehead striking violently against a bolt, knocking him insensible. Thus, hanging doubled up, face downward, near the center of the wheel, his dark clothes were so blended with the timbers that the keen-eyed savages failed to discover him, as they peered over the rail.

Fortunately the young borderer was not seriously injured by his fall, and speedily began to recover his consciousness, for he was not yet out of peril. Gasping, half blind, his head throbbing dizzily, he sought to drag himself up, when, to his intense horror *the wheel began to revolve!* The curious Blackfeet had accidentally set the machinery in motion.

Harle Manning had scarcely time to realize his new peril when he was dashed beneath the chilling water. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, he clutched the iron bar with the energy of despair. Choking, strangling, suffering all the agonies of death, he was hurled through the water as the massive wheel whirled swiftly around. Twice the circuit was made before Manning's grasp weakened. Then as he was plunged beneath the surface, the bar was torn from his fingers. Something struck him violently in the side, knocking the breath out of his body as though his ribs were crushed in.

Gasping painfully for breath, Manning inhaled fresh air instead of water. He was free of that terrible wheel. This much he realized as the current whirled him away from the stern of the boat, and with considerable difficulty he kept his head above the surface, feebly paddling with his hands.

Indeed his escape had been little short of miraculous. He lost his hold as the wheel turned, sinking him into the water. The swift current seized upon his body and whirled it out from between the buckets, though not so quickly but that he received a severe blow from one of the timbers.

When the *Metamora* grounded, she was about half way through the difficult passage known as White Breast Bend. Watkins had run her head upon a long bar that was only covered during very high water. This bar divided the channel nearly in half, so that a boat could pass on either side if under control of a skillful pilot who understood the spot. Jack Donar had taken the "north-chute," though it was the narrowest and most difficult; but then it was also considerably shorter, and the current ran less swift here. In other words, he took the *string* instead of following the bend of the bow.

Thus it was that Manning was swiftly swept toward the south-western shore in an almost direct line, and before his course was turned, he had partially recovered his strength and

paddled steadily across the current, thus losing little ground while gradually nearing land.

The water ran deep close to shore; a single step would carry a man beyond his depth, and it was no trifling task for the young borderer to drag his body up out of the tugging waters, in his partially crippled state. The bank was almost perpendicular at this point, some ten feet above the water. The lower portion was of stiff blue clay, almost slatestone when dry, but the upper half was soft sandy loam, crumbling with its own weight. A man in full possession of his strength and aided by the light of day would have found it hard to scale. To one in Manning's half crippled condition, it became an impossibility, and he crouched down in the deep shade, his eyes fixed upon the puffing, laboring boat, too heart-sick even to think.

Like one in a dream he heard the shouts of Watkins when that worthy returned, and knew from the swiftly-moving lights aboard the *Metamora* that the boat was being searched. Then he noticed a bright light gradually spreading over the surface of the river, and from his position could distinguish the dancing flames of a huge bonfire built upon shore. And as the glow deepened, he lay close to the ground, smearing his face and hands with the blue clay lest their whiteness should betray him to the enemy.

The Blackfeet were rapidly unloading the boat, plying their frail canoes between it and the shore with an energy they rarely bestow upon any thing else but the chase or fighting. The monster they had set in motion began to terrify them.

As he realized this, Manning cast off the lethargy that had stolen over him, and eagerly watched the result. He actually prayed that the boat might explode and in part avenge the massacred whites. But as minute after minute passed by without any change, he began to fear that the Blackfeet would succeed in carrying off their plunder in safety.

Shower of sparks emerged from the smoke-stacks and floated away over the river before fading. The steam came in quick, explosive bursts from the 'scape-pipes, and the clumsy wheel thrashed and churned the muddy water into a mass of foam and bubbles, while the flat bull trembled in

every plank as it gradually crept up on the sand-bar. And then—

The *Metamora* was no more.

A terrific explosion filled the air with flying fragments, clouds of steam and smoke, showers of sparks and sheets of flame; and among the debris was more than one mangled human form!

For one moment it was a scene of awful grandeur. Then a dense veil seemed cast over it, leaving nothing visible save a dull, indistinct glow.

Then came the second phase—even more terrible than the first, if possible. Thousands of fragments of all sizes began falling to the earth and upon the water in every direction. A monstrous hailstorm. And among the missiles were pieces of quivering flesh, dismembered limbs and headless trunks of the Blackfeet who had been aboard when the explosion occurred.

Filled with a strange horror Harle Manning crouched there, unable to move a limb, though the fragments were falling all around him. A spell seemed cast over him as well as the Indians who were upon shore. They stood around the roaring fire as though petrified.

Then the thick cloud slowly arose as the breeze again sprung up. The boat had been broken in two, near the waist. The pieces of hull were still afloat, though all of the cabin and upper decks had been carried away. And now, with the flames swiftly spreading and rising, the bow and stern slowly swung around and yielding to the swift current, floated down stream, lighting up the dark shores with the clearness of noonday.

As if fascinated, Harle Manning kept his eyes riveted upon the blazing fragments, all that was left of the stanch little *Metamora*, nor is it likely that he would have averted them until the hull burned to the water's edge or else disappeared from view around the bend, had not a startling interruption come.

A single rifle-shot broke the almost death-like stillness that had reigned ever since the reverberating echoes had died away. The report was closely followed by a shrill, horrible scream, and swiftly turning his head, Manning was just in

time to see one of the Blackfeet spring up into the air, then fall headlong into the blazing bonfire beside which he had been standing.

Then came a hoarse, roaring sound, more like the angry routing of a wounded buffalo bull than the voice of a human, as a wild-looking creature bounded out into the full glow of the fire. The voice was well matched. Though that night, to Manning, had been one continuous chain of surprises, this was by no means the least.

The man—for such the strange creature appeared to be—was of gigantic mold, overtopping the Blackfeet warriors as though they were but children. Long hair, reaching to his middle and blending with the patriarchal beard, was white as the driven snow, and formed the stranger's only head-covering. Though he was facing that way, Manning could not see enough of his face to decide whether his skin was white or red. A large robe of wolf-skin—made from the white, black and spotted kinds—was looped around his neck and under the left arm, thus leaving his arms free. His body seemed covered with a dense coat of hair; or else he wore a tightly-fitting suit of skins tanned with the hair outside. In his left hand was clutched a rude knife that more nearly resembled a scythe-blade than the weapon usually carried by borderers, so heavy, broad and long was the blade. In his right was a short-handled, double-bladed ax such as woodmen sometimes use.

All this Harle Manning took in at a single glance, for he had not time for more. And in that instant he recognized what he had always regarded as a myth—one of those marvelous creations the superstitious trappers and red-skins are so partial to, at which he had always sneered. This was what men called the *Death-Touch of the Blackfeet*.

There were fully two score of the Blackfeet standing around the fire, the majority of them old and often tried warriors whose greatest joy was in the perils and intoxication of war. And yet, though they knew that this being had just slain one of their band, that he had sent sorrow and shame into every Blackfoot village west of the Missouri, not one of them all raised an arm or drew a weapon to strike for vengeance. Instead, they visibly cowered and shrunk

neath the fiery glance of the weird Death-Touch, seemingly too terrified to think even of flight.

For one breathless moment the giant glared around upon the Blackfeet as though enumerating his victims, then, with another deep, roaring bellow, he began his work of blood. The long, scythe-blade-like knife passed through and through the chest of a brawny warrior. The keen ax was whirled aloft only to descend with irresistible force upon the feathered crown of another savage whose head was cloven in twain as a schoolboy divides an apple. The giant's arms seemed to work independent of each other. Striking at the same time he would cut down an Indian on each side. And with every blow he would utter the horrible roaring bellow that had heralded his coming.

Like one in a dream Harle Manning looked upon this strange scene. He heard the sickening sounds as the weapons crashed down through flesh and bone, and saw the crimsoned blades drip blood in the glow of the fire. He heard the death-shrieks of the stricken braves rising above the strange war-cry of the Death-Touch. It seemed like some fantastic nightmare.

Then, as though the sight of their falling comrades had broken the spell that bound them, the surviving Blackfeet turned to flee, so terror stricken as never once to think of using their weapons upon the scourge of their tribe. And with gigantic strides the Death-Touch followed them, still uttering that hoarse bellow; and even after their forms had disappeared from the young borderer's sight, he could hear the heavy death-blows as victim after victim fell beneath the strong arm of the wild avenger.

As the sound of flight and pursuit gradually died away Harle Manning suddenly remembered that now, if at all, was the time for him to improve his own situation, and at once set about scaling the bank. But this he soon discovered was next to impossible at that point, and he cautiously crept along the bank, digging his toes firmly into the stiff clay, slowly nearing the fire.

His object in taking this course was a double one. He had heard a number of the terrified Indians flee past him, along the bank above. When they should discover that they were

not pursued—for the Death-Touch had followed those going up the river—they would recover from their affright and might discover him if he attempted to pass below. Then, too, Harle was unarmed, having lost one pistol in the grapple on board, and the other while being whirled around on the wheel, together with his sheath-knife. He hoped to find weapons at the fire, and then hoped to make an easy escape in one of the canoes. There appeared little danger of discovery, if he was quick enough.

Reasoning thus, he crept on until he came in contact with a stout root that swung over the water. Grasping this he gave it a stout tug, and to his delight found it was stout enough to support his weight. Aided by this he soon dragged himself up the bank, though once he paused and felt of the bank. Eyesight availed him little here, but he knew that some one had recently ascended by this very root, as the deep impressions of a human foot evidenced.

Reaching the top, he peered keenly forward. The fire was hidden by a good-sized bush directly in front of his position, and he cautiously crawled toward this. He gained the bank, but then a low exclamation escaped him. *He had placed his hand upon a human body, that moved beneath his touch.*

A sinewy hand clutched his throat and bore him forcibly backward.

CHAPTER V.

SHADOWED.

"It's the Metamora—reckon she's done bu'st her wiler," said Honest Hand in a subdued tone, as the dull reverberations died away.

"And our friends—God grant that they have escaped!" murmured Edna, fervently, for the moment forgetting that the horrible scene she had witnessed was not all a dream.

"Mebbe they hev," hastily returned Honest Hand, though he firmly believed her to be the only one save Watkins who had escaped from the boat. "I'd like to 'a' bin whar I could 'a' seed the bu'st up—from the racket I reckon it must 'a' lie

a powerful one. Ef the hull kit o' red galoots hed bin aboard her, I reckon they'd 'a' found tharselves a heap nigher heaven than they'll ever git ag'in. But thar—we're burnin' daylight. Thar's a long trail afore us, an' it ain't none too easy fer tender feet, nuther. Jest hang onto my arm, an' we'll git along fust chop. Thar—that's the ticket."

"Where are you taking me?" timidly ventured Edna.

"Es straight home to your father es we kin go. The kentry is powerfully cut up 'long hyar, an' we've got to make a consid'able circumbendibus. 'F you was a tough old beaver like me, we could shorten it a heap, an' make the post afore noon to-morrow. Es it is, we've got a good two days' tramp afore us, pervidin' the varmints don't strike our trail too soon. That or'nary Watkins feller won't give you up none too easy—that I know from what I heard the reptyle tell you on the trail. He's pizen mean, clean through, an' hates the cap'n wuss'n Death-Touch does a Blackfoot. He'll jest nat'ally rip an' t'ar when he finds out how slick I've fooled 'im; but he cain't do much afore daylight."

"Can he find us then? Can't we walk more careful, or break our trail in some way? I've read of such things."

"I'll show ye a little o' that afore long, little one," laughed Honest Hand. "We've got about three hours yet o' night, an' in that time we must kiver as much ground as you kin stan'. You see it's just this-a-way. When Watkins or Oo-looteka—which is the Injun who owns them squaws I took you from; a bigger thief an' devil never trod on parfleesh—whenever they git back to the den, they 'll find out you're gone an' who 'twas helped you, for the squaws know me well enough. They'll be red-hot, in course, to git you back an' lift my skelp."

"What'll they do? It don't need a prophet to tell *that*. I kin mark out thar trail from the word cut loose. They knew that the only place o' safety fer you is at the post. They know you're a tender critter, not fitted by natur' fer much rough work. They know 'twould be onpossible fer you to take the cross-cut over the hills an' 'crost the kenyens, es a Injun squaw might do. Knowin' this, they know that we must take *this* trail, up the valley, fer some ten miles, any-how. What then? Just this."

"Ef they find out you're gone afore day, they'll jist strike up the valley at full speed, an' keep on until daylight. Then they'll look fer the trail. Ef they cain't find it, they'll know they've passed us in the dark, an' so they'll lay low fer us. Ef 'tain't thar', they'll keep on until they do find it. That's why I say we must make the best of our time hyar. Ain't no use in kiverin' one's trail whar you're sartin the varmints won't stop to look fer it. Time enough fer that when we git to whar' thar's a choice o' trails."

"You know best, and I am willing to trust all to you. I don't believe you would deceive me," faltered Edna.

"Little one, lis'en," earnestly added Honest Hand. "I've knowed your father ever sence I was a young man. In all that time—longer ago than when you was born, by years—he's bin the best and truest fri'nd I ever hed. Afore I knowed him well, I was goin' to the dogs as fast as I could. Mebbe the wickedness was born in me. Any how, 'twas thar. I was a good hand wi' the traps, but I got so I couldn't be trusted. I was crazy a'ter whisky an' keerds. I'd gam'le or drink up my outfit mebbe the same hour I got it. I did it so of'en that nobody wouldn't trust me no more. Then I loafed 'round the post fer a hull season, makin' a bruce and Injun o' myself. When I wasn't drunk, I was fightin' all the time. I killed two men that season, an' cut up two or three others, over the keerds. The last time the boys soured on me, an' hitched a lariat round my thrapple. They war goin' to string me up, when your father as is now cut in an' saved me, though he tasted both lead an' steel afore the boys would listen to his talk. I needn't tell you all that he said to me, aterward, but he talked to me like a Dutch uncle, an' made me see what a wuthless cuss I hed grown to be. Well, I promised him then that he shouldn't hev no cause to feel sorry fer savin' me, an' I kin honestly say that I've never went back on my word. I soaked on whisky an' keerds an' in the fust season more'n paid back your father the outfit he'd furnished me wr'h. I hain't touched keerd's nor bin drunk sence that day. The to s hev all forget what a dog I onceet was; an' I ain't a-shamed to look any human critter in the face. But I never fergit who I owe it all to; your father. Now do you think you need be afeard to trust me?"

"No—if you love my father so truly, I know I am safe with you," impulsively replied Edna.

"Not a hair o' your pritty head shell be tetched while Honest Hand lives, little one. Ef you ain't safe in your father's arms afore forty-eight hours, it'll be because I'm rubbed out," simply added the veteran.

This little confession of the scout's placed the duo at once upon the best of footing, and Edna hung upon his arm, chatting as confidentially as though they had been life-long acquaintances. Every few minutes her brow would cloud and her heart sicken as she remembered what a change the last few hours had wrought—as the horrible massacre of her friends would force itself before her mind's eye, but with no little tact Honest Hand would manage to divert her thoughts by narrating incidents of the father she had seen so little of during the past ten years. Naturally a voluble talker, he fairly outdone himself now. Yet he did not lose sight of prudence, speaking softly, and keeping his ears and eyes upon the alert, though he felt pretty well assured that all the savages of that section had gathered to attack the boat.

In this manner they proceeded up the valley for fully an hour after leaving the retreat of Oolooteka. Honest Hand was in the midst of an adventure that had once happened to Captain Allen and himself, when he suddenly ceased speaking, standing as rigid as a stone statue.

"What is the matter?" faltered Edna, a strange thrill at her heart strings.

"It's all right—thar hain't nothin' the matter I don't reckon," hastily replied Honest Hand, as he drew her hand further through his arm and again strode forward.

He at once resumed the story he had been narrating, but appeared to have lost all interest in it. At times he would repeat himself, or drawl out disconnected sentences in a low tone, as though his thoughts were elsewhere. Edna noticed this, and she likewise saw the scout cast occasional glances behind him, more earnest and lingering than those with which he regarded the front. Ignorant as she was in such matters Edna felt assured that something out of the common was about to take place, and her trembling hand quickly told the tale to the quick-witted trapper.

"So *you've* hearn it, too?" he muttered, glancing down upon the pale countenance of the maiden.

"I have heard nothing unusual—but I know that there is danger, from your changed voice and manner. Tell me what it is. If I can not help, I will not hinder you," was the brave reply.

"'F you hedn't 'a' told me, I'd 'a' knowed you was the ap'n's da'ter jest by them words," exclaimed Honest Hand, admiringly. "But thar—kin you hear it *now*?"

"I can only hear the moaning of the wind through the rocks and tree-tops," Edna replied, after a brief pause, during which she had hearkened with bated breath.

"That's 'cause you was raised in the city, whar thar's so much clickety-clack all the time. It's plain enough to me. The fact is, little one, some one's a-follerin' us. I hearn them nigh hafe a hour ago, but didn't like to say nothin' afore I was sure 'twas us they was a'ter. Mebbe you noticed I waiked fast fer a bit, then slowed up ag'in. They did the same, keepin' jest so fur ahind us. Thar *may* be only one; sartinly thar ain't more'n two on 'em, or they'd 'a' bounced us afore now. Whoever 'tis, hes got fri'nds ahind 'em somewhars, fer they've bin *markin' the trail*. 'Twas the snappin' o' a bush that fust opened my eyes. Sence then I've hearn the same a dozen times, an' knowed that 'twas done a-purpose, fer the trail was open enough fer a gover'ment mule to pass through 'thout tetchin' a leaf. We're nearly to the place whar I meant to break the trail, but what good 'll it do while that varmint is markin' down the way we go? Not a mite. I've got to put him out o' the way."

These sentences were uttered quietly by Honest Hand as he strode along. He did not mean to arouse the suspicions of the secret trailer until ready to strike.

Though trembling with apprehension, Edna did not speak. She believed that Honest Hand would act for the best.

"Thar is sech a thing as accidents happenin'," quietly added the trapper guide. "It may be my time fer one now—thar's no tellin'. But the varmint or varmints behind thar must be rubbed out, or they'll hole us, sure. While I'm doin' it, you jest keep on as we're goin'. Ef I come out all right, I'll soon ketch you again. 'F I don't, you look fer two dead

trees standin' one on each side of a narrow pass to your right. Be sure an' take that; an' when the sun rises, keep it behind your right shoulder ontel noon. But thar—I guess you won't hev no need o' rememberin' this—I feel it in my bones 'at I'm goin' to rub out the nigger. Good-by now, little one—keep right straight on."

Without giving Elna time to reply, Honest Hand slipped his arm free and crouched down beside a scrubby bush that grew close along the trail. With one glance after the light form of the maiden as she disappeared in the gloom, the trapper drew his heavy knife and listened intently.

For a few moments his brow wrinkled. He feared the secret trailer had taken the alarm, for not a sound came from the back trail. And yet, just before pausing, he had heard the faint snapping of a twig being broken.

Without a moment's warning the bush beside which he had crouched was gently agitated, and Honest Hand heard a small bough bent over and broken. It was a complete surprise. Even while he was listening keenly, the secret trailer had glided up unseen and unheard until only a yard of dwarf oak divided them. Though it may sound strange, a momentary pang of jealousy shot through the veteran's heart. He doubted whether he had not met his match at last.

He was not given time for reflection. A faintly outlined head and shoulders came into view, and knowing the he must be speedily discovered, Honest Hand made a quick clutch at the trailer's throat, at the same time dealing a fierce, downright blow with his bowie-knife.

The form of the trailer seemed to wilt before the trapper's grasp. There was not even a struggle. The body fell to the ground, a jet of hot blood spirting over the trapper's hand.

A low cry broke from Honest Hand's lips, despite the belief that another foe was close at hand. The surpriser had been surprised, almost as thoroughly as the secret trailer. And the veteran trembled like a leaf as he cautiously peered over the top of the bush. There was nothing to be seen. Still he was too old a scout to risk defeat needlessly, and remained in ambush.

"Who'd 'a' think it!" he mused, and there was a tinge of

regret in his words. "The little varmint! A babby like him! It's more'n ary full growed red-skin 'at ever I seed could do. He crawled up hyar still as a snake. 'F I'd only 'a' knowed it in time! I never hed babby blood on my hands afore. Makes me crawl all over!"

Satisfied that there were no other enemies close at hand, the trapper bent over the form of his victim. It was that of the lad whom he had bound when freeing Edna—Oolooteka's only son. As his hand closed upon the small throat, Honest Hand saw his mistake, but too late to withhold his blow.

How the lad freed himself, he could only conjecture. But that he had followed on with a skill that would have done his father credit, intending to track the fugitives down, at the same time leaving a plain trail for his friends to follow, was beyond a doubt. It was a remarkable exhibition of courage, skill and determination in one so young, and even the old trapper felt that the lad had deserved a happier reward.

"Some o' the boys, mebbe 'd think 'twas a waste o' time that might be spent better in puckachcein', but I cain't leave the poor little varmint hyar fer the coyotes to gnaw. I'll jest tote it on a bit an' kiver it up in the rocks," muttered Honest Hand, as he almost reverently lifted the limp corpse in his arms and glided rapidly away in the direction taken by Edna.

He had not to go far before finding a suitable spot, and laid the body under the edge of a huge boulder, rolling heavy stones up before it so that no wild beast could rifle the rude grave. Then, with the point of his knife he made a few rude scratches upon the boulder, saying:

"Oolooteka 'll know my mark, an' then he won't be able to say 'twas fear o' him as made me hide it. He won't do no more dodgin' from this time on. I cain't say my skelp's my own onless I kin lift his'n fust. Well, mebbe it's better so, a'ter all."

Honest Hand, this duty—for duty he deemed it—over, hastened up the valley; and soon ventured to utter a low cry, hoping to arrest Edna. He was successful, though not until after he had called several times, the maiden's fears preventing her recognizing his voice. As he came up with her, Edna uttered:

"Thank God! you are safe. Then you were mistaken—there were no persons following us?"

"Thar was one—but he ain't followin' us no longer. I reckon we'll hev plenty o' time to break our trail an' hunt a place whar we kin rest fer a while. The wust o' the trail is afore us yit, an' 'twon't do to start on it onless you're fresh."

"I am willing to trust all to you," simply replied Edna.

"We'll begin now, then. You see the ground's gittin' pritty well kivered with shale. But you're too fresh from the settlements to hev a judgmatical foot yit. You'll hev to let me kerry you fer a bit."

Edna's faint remonstrance as to her being too heavy a load, was quietly silenced by Honest Hand's lifting her in his arms as he might an infant, and as she felt his heart throb steadily against her cheek, she felt an almost perfect sense of security. She knew that no harm could possibly come to her while he lived.

Honest Hand, though progressing more slowly than before seemed gifted with a cat-like power of seeing in the dark, so easily did he wind through the gloom, keeping carefully upon the shale or springing lightly from rock to rock, never once planting his foot where it could leave a telltale impress behind it.

He reached the spot where he had directed Edna to leave the valley, but kept on beyond it. He felt assured that Oolooteka would not omit searching this pass, as it was the first one that led from the valley on the side the fugitives must take, as well as the one easiest for a woman to follow. He had slightly altered his plans since disposing of the secret jailer. He knew that Oolooteka would move heaven and earth, but what he would have vengeance for the death of his son, and it would be worse than folly for Edna to hope to pass through the country in daylight. Their flight must be aided by darkness.

The eastern sky was growing less dark, as Honest Hand toiled over the rocks, steadily leaving the valley behind him, seemingly intending to cross the ridge. But he soon turned aside and following a winding trail that would have been invisible to common eyes, he at last entered a narrow passage

leading between two huge masses of rock, then widening again, to end at the edge of a deep crevasse fully a dozen feet in width. Bidding Edna close her eyes, Honest Hand ran swiftly forward and rising in the air like a bounding deer, cleared the abyss despite the weight he carried. Fortunately Edna had not known of his intention, else she might have ruined all, for it was a trying feat.

"Now, little one, I reckon you kin walk a little. Thar ain't nothin on these rocks to keep a print o' sech a light foot as your'n is, an' we're pritty nigh the place whar we'll hev to spend the day."

"Spend the day!" echoed Edna, not a little surprised.

Honest Hand quickly explained his reasons, and she had the good sense to see that he must know best, though the idea of remaining idle for so long was inexpressibly repugnant to her. It seemed so easy, with the long start they had gained, to pass over the two score miles that yet intervened between them and safety.

The level did not last long, and the fugitives were soon toiling among the rocks again, Honest Hand cheering Edna with the assurance that a few minutes would see them at the retreat he had selected.

"Jest up this trail," he said, indicating a narrow channel strongly resembling those one frequently finds worked out in an earthen bank by water. "I don't b'lieve thar's ary livin' critter 'cept me knows o' this place."

By his aid Edna managed to scramble up the steep incline, and then Honest Hand pushed aside a huge slab rock that leaned against what seemed the solid rock, revealing a dark cavity. Entering first, Honest Hand conducted Edna to a bed of dry leaves and moss. Then he bade her remain still until he returned.

"I'll fill my gourd wi' fresh water, then we'll be fixed fer all day. While I'm gone, you kin be chawin' on a bit o' this meat. It's dry an' tough, but it'll keep a feller from starvin'. You won't be afeard in the dark?"

"No—not if you return soon."

"I won't be gone ten minutes. Thar's water clost hyar, though it don't look like it."

Honest Hand left the cave, but suddenly paused in replac-

ing the stone, raising erect. A curious change passed over his countenance. A faint sound came to his ears.

"It's business now!" he muttered. "Oolooteka's found his boy. That's his yell. Its the *death-hunt* from this on!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DISCOVERY.

TAKEN utterly by surprise, Harle Manning was forced backward to the ground, offering scarcely any resistance, and the next moment lay completely at the mercy of his sinewy assailant. A knee pressed heavily upon his breast and the bony fingers seemed as though they would meet in the flesh of his throat. Death appeared inevitable. His brain was throbbing as though it would burst. His veins seemed filled with liquid fire.

But then, with a low exclamation of astonishment, Harle's antagonist relaxed his deadly grasp and bent closer to the mud-covered face beneath him. With a blessed sense of relief Manning inflated his lungs, and the blood-red blurr passed from before his eyes.

"Who are you, anyway? white or red?" demanded the man who had surprised the young borderer, in a tone of doubt.

"George Howard—that you?" gasped Manning.

"Harle, by the eternal! I took you for a sneaking red-skin—"

"Pity you didn't find out your mistake before you tore my throat clear out," replied Harle, disgustedly fingering his wind-pipe. "I won't be able to swallow for a month."

"Who'n thunder 'd think it was *you* creeping along like a snake, your face black as a nigger's pocket—"

"It's mud—I put it on to fool the red-skins."

"And got fooled instead—luckily for you you hadn't shaved yesterday. I felt the bristles—but say; isn't this a glorious mess? What're we going to do?"

"I thought of stealing a canoe. But whatever we attempt must be done quickly, for it'll not be long before some of those imps will be back, and if they once sight us, it's good-bye John! A man can't fight without the tools."

"We'll find plenty yonder—they were dropped when that what-d'y'-call it put in an appearance. Did you see it, Harle? Ugh! it makes my flesh creep just to think of it. Ge-thunder! how he *did* wade into the varmints!"

"You remember what old Jesse Roberts said about the Death-Touch? You laughed at him then, but you couldn't now. There—I'll lead the way; you follow close. We mustn't lose any more time."

Harle Manning, fairly himself again, though feeling rather uncomfortable about the throat, crawled away from the bush beneath whose shadows he had only escaped death by Howard's being unarmed, and rapidly approached the fire. Though there were no live Indians to be seen, it was possible that the bushes or rocky coverts around concealed one or more, and the young men felt any thing but comfortable as they stepped out into the full glow of the fire. At any moment an arrow or a rifle-bullet might be sent to their hearts from ambush, without giving them a chance for life. But it was a risk that they felt obliged to run. Without weapons they would stand a poor show of reaching Fort Union now that Oolooteka's band was up.

Harle, used as he was to the wild life of the western border, could not suppress a shudder as he gazed around upon the fearful handiwork of the Death-Touch. Five Blackfeet lay dead upon the ground, not more than as many yards separating the two furthest apart. Each brave still clutched his weapons; as before stated, not one of them had attempted to defend themselves.

"Make haste, Manning," muttered Howard. "I want to get out of this as soon as possible. There's no telling how soon some of those varmints may be back."

"Make sure you get the right bullets for your fire-arms, George," said Harle, coolly, as he fitted one of a handful of little pellets to the muzzle of a long rifle. "True as you live I've found old Jesse Roberts' Sweet-lips!"

But, as the reader may remember, the old trapper had used

his favorite rifle up over the heads of the Blackfeet. Harle was deceived by a close resemblance to that noted weapon.

"Here's a revolver—but it's empty."

"Take a powder-horn. I've got bullets for navy size. Come—down to the canoes. My hair feels uneasy here."

Tolerably well armed, the two men glided down to the river, where a number of canoes were resting with prow on bank, some of them still loaded with plunder from the boat.

Howard stepped into one of the frail crafts, and almost instantly uttered a cry of delight.

"In luck, by thunder! Here's a wagon-load of guns, knives and revolvers—stolen from our poor friends, no doubt. Step in—I've got the paddles."

"Wait until I cast the others loose," said Harle, as he pushed the extra canoes out into the current. "There! If they follow us, it'll have to be by land."

"Across, or up on this side?"

"This side is the best. If we are careful, and keep close in under the bank there's little danger of being discovered. Pull steady, now."

The two men bent to their paddles and steadily, though slowly breasted the rapid current, soon passing beyond the circle of light cast out by the fire. Listening intently, they could hear nothing suspicious from the bank above. It seemed as though the Death-Touch had fairly cleared the ground.

When once fairly beyond the circle of light, the two men feeling that there was little danger of their being discovered while they kept close under the high bank in the gloom, caught hold of a mass of roots that had been laid bare by the action of the water, and held the canoe stationary.

"Keep her steady, George, while I take a look at our cargo. When we choose what we need, I reckon it would be as well to pitch the rest overboard. The red-skins can't find them then, and now it only makes dead weight for us to pull."

The examination had to be made almost altogether by sense of touch, but Manning found little difficulty in selecting two brace of revolvers and a couple of rifles, trying each lock, knowing that the sullen, hoarse washing of the river as

It chafed the bank, would deaden the clicking sound, even if an enemy should chance to pause directly overhead.

While thus engaged, the two comrades conversed in low, guarded tones. George Howard had been one of the clerks on the ill-fated *Metamora*, and for over a week before the attack, had been suffering severely with fever and ague. He was in his berth, sleeping, when the report of the howitzer awakened him. Instantly divining the truth, he hastily donned a portion of his clothes and seizing his weapons, rushed forth to take his part in the melee, never once remembering that he was an invalid. But fate decreed that Howard should not cover himself with glory, at least on board the *Metamora* that night. In descending the ladder, his foot slipped and he fell heavily overboard, the swift current sweeping him below the boat before he could recover his senses enough to prevent it. Finding himself in deep water, George swam ashore, but like Harle, for some time was unable to scale the bank. When he did find the pendant root, the fire had been built and he dared not venture beyond the bush, where he was encountered by Manning. Unarmed—for in his fall, even the knife had dropped from his belt—he could do nothing but wait.

"I'll tell you what I think the best plan," said Harle, as the comrades noiselessly dropped the weapons into the river, one after another. "We'll keep up the river until we pass Rock Walls, then strike 'cross lots to the post. It'll be tough pulling, but we can get there some hours sooner. Then we'll call for volunteers and if we don't have pay for this night's work, I'm a Blackfoot."

"I'm willing to leave it to you, Manning. All I want is to get a chance to put in a few extra licks for poor brother Tom. I suppose they've rubbed him out and lifted his hair long ago."

"They have a black score to settle—curse them!"

"Yours isn't the least—I forgot *her*," muttered George, as a recollection of Edna Allen flashed across his mind.

"Drop that, Howard," uttered Harle, hoarsely. "I'm fighting to keep it out of my mind until our work is done. I don't want to go crazy yet—I will if I let myself think!"

There was something in his tone that almost frightened

George Howard, brave as he undoubtedly was, and awed him into silence. The two men resumed their paddles and urged the frail bark canoe rapidly up the river, keeping close in to the bank. It was a long, trying struggle for mastery, and at times the boat seemed almost stationary, so strong was the current.

But the fugitives were fated never to carry out their original plan. Invisible in the gloom, a half-sunken log came dashing along and struck the bow of the canoe fair and squarely, crushing through the bark as though it were made of paper. This was the first intimation the boatmen had of danger, and they had scarcely time to make a quick spring for land before the massive log forced the ventilated canoe under water.

Confused and bewildered, Harle and George received a thorough ducking before they could make good their landing upon the steep, slippery bank. And then it was some time before they could work close enough together to make conversation safe.

"Everything works crooked to-night," muttered Howard, disgustedly. "Canoe gone—our firearms wet—"

"Good-by to our plan of passing the ridges. We must either go back and strike up the valley, or else try to cross the hills--"

"A mountain goat 'd break its neck on such a trip in the dark! Our only show 's the valley," interrupted Howard.

"I believe we would save time. But then there are the red-skinned devils. Ten to one we stumble upon some of them."

"If we do, I reckon some of 'em 'll think they've run against an earthquake! But it's a chance we must run. Perhaps that queer old Death-Touch will come and sweep the path clear for us again—who knows?" half laughed Howard.

"Don't believe we can climb the bank here—"

"Don't see the need of trying. We'd only have to follow the bank down any way. A cat couldn't scale the rocks above. Our pistols are wet any way, so a little more water won't hurt them. We can float down-stream until we find a good place to get out at."/>

"Your head 's worth two of mine, George—somehow I'm all mixed up—can't think straight. Come—there's no use in waiting any longer."

Making sure that their knives and revolvers were secured from slipping out while in the water, the comrades dropped from their perch into the river and began floating downstream. Despite their weight of arms and saturated clothing, this was a comparatively easy task, so powerful was the current. Their rifles had sunk with the canoe. The accident was so sudden and unlooked-for that neither of the men had time to grasp their weapons.

"The imps must have been mighty bad scared, not to have got back yet!" uttered Howard, as they came in view of the spot where the fire had been built opposite the Metamora.

"They may be there, for all that. I reckon we're close enough for comfort, now. If we can only climb the bank."

"I've got a root—reckon it's strong enough to hold our weight," eagerly added Howard, as they reached the shore.

"Shin up it then—but careful. There may be a dozen of the imps within ear-shot, for all we know."

"Listen!"

There came a low, mournful sound, yet distinct above the murmur of the water; the long-drawn note of the wood-pigeon. As if in answer, the shrill chirp of the cicada came from near the fire; then the cry of the spotted night-hawk, the peculiar notes of the rain-crow.

"It's the red skins, collecting after their scare. Wait a bit, or you may run smack against one of them," cautiously whispered Manning, his trained ear detecting the imitations, clever as they were.

A faint footfall upon the bank above them told how timely was this caution, and for some minutes the young scouts lay still as death. But then, fearing lest the break of day would surprise them before they could work clear of the enemy's lines, they clambered up the root and gained the level ground.

"Keep close to me," muttered Harle, "I want to find a place where we can keep an eye on the varmints by the fire, while we put our shooters in order."

This was no easy task, unless they ventured still closer to the enemy, which, under the circumstances would be arrant folly,

but Harle finally succeeded. Upon the hillside, they themselves hidden beside a vine-covered boulder, the young scouts could peer out upon the Blackfeet who had assembled around the fire.

"If old Death-Touch would only sock it to 'em again!" whispered Howard, vindictively.

"Not likely. They couldn't be caught napping again. But come; we're burning daylight. Get to work and unload your pistols. We may have use for them before daybreak certainly will before we set eyes on old Fort Union."

This was difficult work, as they had no means of extracting the bullets from their revolver cylinders save with a small-bladed penknife that Manning happily had in his pocket. But patience and perseverance will accomplish wonders, and one by one the leaden pellets were picked to pieces and the cylinders cleaned. After this it was an easy task, and the wet powder was removed, the tubes wiped dry and fresh loads inserted, as the tightly stoppered powder-horns had not leaked during the brief time the young scouts were in the water.

Harle was charging the last cylinder, when Howard, who had been keeping a close watch over the movements of the enemy around the fire, which had been replenished, uttered a low exclamation of surprise.

"What is it, George?" quickly asked Manning.

"Look at that white man yonder—where have I seen him before?" was the excited reply, as he indicated a tall figure standing in the full glow of the fire, though with his face averted from the ambushed scouts.

"His figure looks familiar; if he would only turn around so we could—Thunder and blazes!" exclaimed Manning, in a tone louder than was prudent under the circumstances, as the white man suddenly faced about, the firelight distinctly revealing his features.

"Watkins, by the eternal! free, and with arms in his hands!"

"You know what black rumors are abroad about him—enough to hang a thousand such men, only positive proof is lacking. If we could only hear what he is saying now, perhaps we could get the drop on him."

"I'm going to try it—the cover's good enough. I'll crawl up until I can hear him talk. If he has had a finger in this affair, he's got to settle with me, if only for poor brother Tom's sake."

"It's likely they've got some of their braves scattered out through the bushes, to guard against another visit from the Death-Touch, but I guess we'll risk it. If we can hear enough to convict the rascal, it will be worth the trouble."

The young scouts crawled stealthily toward the fire, using every precaution to guard against discovery, while holding their weapons in readiness to sell their lives dearly if the occasion arose. But their progress was suddenly interrupted.

From up the valley came a faint cry, rapidly succeeded by others, each one sounding nearer and more distinct. The scouts paused, interchanging glances. The Blackfeet, after a moment of hesitation, glided away from the fire and sought cover. The next moment the spot seemed deserted by all human life.

The cries sounded nearer, and then, as though recognizing the voice, a tall, scarred Blackfoot sprung up and answered it. A few moments later the figure of a squaw darted up beside the fire, and in a hurried, breathless voice, uttered a few words.

Harle Manning started as though he had been shot. He had distinguished the words, "pale squaw," and "Honest Hand." He listened eagerly for the chief's reply; for the scarred brave was Oolooteka, the outcast. His long residence at the post had made him pretty thoroughly acquainted with the Blackfoot dialect.

But before Oolooteka could speak, Watkins sprung forward and exclaimed, rudely clutching the squaw's arm.

"What is that you say? where is the white squaw I left you to guard? Speak quick—quick!"

"She is gone. Honest Hand came soon after you left. He must have watched you, for he gave the right signal. He bound our hands and feet and then took the white squaw away."

"If he bound you, how came your hands free now?" asked Watkins, glaring around as though suspicious he was being made the victim of a plot.

"My little boy-chief has teeth like the ground squirrel. He gnawed my bonds, and then I freed him. He stole away upon the trail of Honest Hand, and he said he would make it so a blind man could follow at a run. I came here to tell you."

"Five horses, two rifles and a keg of fire-water to the brave who first strikes Honest Hand and brings me the pale-face squaw!" shouted Watkins, and his voice was quickly drowned by the glad yells of the Indians who seemed eager to win the truly munificent reward.

During this, Harle Manning had been like one stupefied, though he eagerly drank in every word. That this pale squaw was none other than Edna Allen, whom he had supposed murdered, came over his mind like a revelation. A score of incidents, trifling in themselves, but now, when connected, forming a strong chain, convinced him that Watkins had been a leading agent in the past tragedy; then it was possible that he had carried Edna off, too, if only to wreak his hatred for Joshua Allen, upon the head of his daughter.

"What now?" asked George, as the Indians to a man, darted away.

"You heard what he said? I'm going to follow them though they lead the way to hell itself!" gratingly replied Manning, as he glided forward.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

HONEST HAND paused for a few moments, until the faint echoes of the distant yell died away. The expression of anxiety deepened upon his weather-beaten features. As he had observed, from this on there would be stern, deadly work. Oolooteka would never rest until he had avenged the death of his son. And Honest Hand knew that the bereaved outcast would swear the death-hunt against the destroyer of his boy-brave.

"Only fer the little one, I wouldn't mind," muttered the trapper as he resumed his descent, using every precaution to guard against leaving a trace that might serve to guide the vengeful eyes of Oolooteka. "I'd rather like it than not, for then we could settle our a'count. It's bin runnin' long enough. Good two years sence I could raally sw'ar 'at my skelp's my own. But I'd rather wait then git *her* in more trouble. Reckon she'll be safe up thar. A bloodhound couldn't sca'cely foller the trail we made, an' I'm e'ena'most sartin they don't none o' the red varmints know any thin' 'bout the hole. Ef they do—waal; thar'll be some powder burned an' a consid'able sprinklin' o' red varmints sent to never-come-back-ag'in, I reckon, afore they kin lay han's on the cap'n's da'ter."

Uttering these words in a tone barely audible to himself, Honest Hand reached the tiny spring that bubbled up from beneath the gray, moss-covered rock, and stooping, filled his water gourd, then bending his head and drinking heartily. A faint click met his ear, and quickly lifting his head, Honest Hand beheld a sight that might well cause his bronzed cheek to blanch.

The dark muzzle of a long rifle was staring him full in the face. Above the barrel two fiery eyes were glaring at him aglow with what seemed fiendish hatred and exultation.

The long, tangled masses of hair and beard, white as the driven snow; the rude dress of skins; the gigantic frame; the eyes that seemed more like those of wild beasts than human orbs—all these points the veteran trapper drank in at a glance, and a strange, cold thrill crept over his frame as he recognized in his antagonist the marvelous being called the Death-Touch, of whom so many strange tales were told. Yet, superstitious as he undeniably was, Honest Hand never flinched, but stood erect, his eyes riveted upon the glowing orbs of the wild man. The old trapper would never disgrace his race.

For a moment thus, then the eyes of the Death-Touch seemed to pale, and a milder expression to gradually creep over his face, though the rifle-muzzle still covered the trapper's brain. Honest Hand was growing impatient. His muscles were gradually bracing, and he was about to spring

forward and take the chances of a death grapple, when the Death-Touch, who evidently read the trapper's half formed resolve, uttered, in a deep, not unpleasant voice:

"Keep quiet, old man, unless you are in a hurry to die. One life more or less matters little to me."

"Why in thunder don't yer let flicker, then?" indignantly retorted Honest Hand. "Think I'm goin' to stan' foolin' 'yar all day? Reckon you must take me fer a fool!"

"Don't be too impatient; it's not healthy. I wish to ask you a few questions. On your answers depends your fate. Easy—if you attempt to raise that rifle, your trail ends right here. Don't be a fool. Can't you see I've got the dead wood on you?"

"What is 't ye want?" sullenly growled Honest Hand.

"First, who and what are you?"

"A white man—didn't take me fer a nigger, did ye?"

"Look here, stranger, you're acting the fool. I don't want to hurt you, if I can get around it. What I want to know is this: what have you done with the white girl you had with you last night?" sharply added the Death-Touch.

"'F you know so much, find out the rest by your smartness."

"Perhaps I'm smarter than you think. Suppose I should say you have hidden her within two hundred yards of this spot? There—you needn't think to scare me with ugly looks. I know more than you gave me credit for. I know that you took her away from the spot where a white renegade hid her. I know that you brought her here and left her in a cave that you believed known only to yourself, whereas it has been one of my homes for nearly two years past. But what I wish to know further is—who is she and what do you intend doing with her?"

"All right. I'll tell ye. But mind this. If you mean her any harm, you've got to walk over me fust."

"I don't mean her harm—on the contrary, I mean to see her in safety, if possible. I only fight against the accursed Blackfeet and their treacherous allies."

There was something in the Death-Touch's tone that reassured Honest Hand, and he replied with more confidence.

"Mebbe you've hearn tell of Cap'n Joshua Allen, at Fort Union? This is his da'ter. She was on board the Meta-

emory, when the Blackfeet cleaned out the consarn. A fule called Watkins stole her away, an' tuk her to the hole whar Golocteka, the outcast, hides, an' left her wi' the squaws. I follered him, tuck her away an' brung her byar. Soon 's it gits dark ag'in, we're goin' to start fer the post."

"I believe you're telling the truth. It fits in with what I a'ready know. What's your name?"

"Folks call me Honest Hand," replied the veteran trapper.

"I've heard of you. It's a name you should be proud on. Will you take my hand?" abruptly said the Death-Touch as he lowered his rifle. "You hesitate—very well. There is blood upon it—the blood of scores; but it is the blood of treacherous murderers who have deeply wronged me—who have made my life a curse and a burden, with only one comfort, only one hope—and that is *vengeance*!"

"Folks say 't you don't stop to see whether you're drawin' bead on a red-skin or a trapper," ventured Honest Hand.

"They lie! there is no white blood on my hands, save that of those men who had joined the Blackfeet, acting as decoys to guide those who trusted them into the destroyer's net. But then—I don't blame you. I know what black tales are afloat concerning me—just as there ever are about those who are not fully understood. Yet I will prove that I am your friend, if only because of the innocent maiden you have under your charge. Listen: you killed the son of Oolooteka. There, I know what you would say. He was trailing you, and it was a necessary deed. He was a young blood-hound and would have proved a bitter scourge to our race, under his father's teachings. But let that pass. You came here, thinking you had broken your trail effectually. Yet I followed you, and that before it was fairly daylight. So with Oolooteka. A thirst for revenge will sharpen his faculties and make him keen and subtle as a sleuth-hound. Before the sun is overhead, he will be here, with all his band of cutthroats. It is just possible that he may pass by without seeing you, or scenting out the cave. If he does find it, you will have to fight, and I will help you. Together we can beat back the entire tribe, let alone these two score superstitious varlets. They look upon me as an evil spirit, against whom their weapons are harmless. You shall see

them flee like coyotes before the mountain grizzly. We will drink blood—blood!”

“Water squinches my thirst a heap better,” dryly observed Honest Hand. “But look hyar. We mustn’t fergit the gal. ‘F I was alone, I wouldn’t ax nothin’ better than to hev a rumpus wi’ the varmints, ‘specially as I’ve swore a big oath to lift Oolooteka’s top-not the first chainece I got. But I’ve promised I’d see her safe home to her father, an’ I can’t go back on my word.”

“You need not. If the rascals discover your retreat, I will hold them at bay while you conduct the maiden to her friends,” promptly replied the Death-Touch.

“But *how*? I don’t reckon they’d be perlite enough to make way an’ let us pass through ‘em.”

“While they’re knocking at the front, you can slip out at the back door,” replied Death-Touch, half-laughing.

“You ain’t dreamin’?” doubtingly asked Honest Hand.

“No. There are two ways of entering or leaving the cave, though one of them is very difficult. Still, a stout and resolute man can accomplish it, with the aid I shall give you. Come—to prove that I am what I say—your friend—I will show you this other entrance.”

“I don’t believe you mean any mischief, but ef you do, jist look out for squalls,” added Honest Hand significantly.

“Bah! don’t be a fool! if I meant mischief, I would have shot you down without stopping to parley. See! to prove that I know where you have sought refuge, I’ll lead the way.”

With long strides the Death-Touch preceded Honest Hand, and as though thoroughly acquainted with the spot, advanced directly to the steep trail and nimbly scaling it, turned around at the entrance with a low laugh. Honest Hand quickly followed him, still doubting. It was not easy to choke down the superstitious fancies of several years’ growth.

The Death-Touch seemed about to speak, when he was interrupted by the distant report of firearms, mingled with faint yells. His chest dilated and his eyes began to glow with the maniacal fire that had filled their depths when Honest Hand first observed him. In an instant his entire appearance had changed. No longer the cool, quiet though

singular-looking being, he seemed like one beside himself. His eyes flashed, his teeth grated fiercely together, a few flecks of froth fringed his lips, and a deep, rumbling sound issued from the depths of his chest.

Honest Hand watched this change in mute wonderment, and had scarcely time to leap aside as the Death-Touch sprang forward, descending the steep trail and bounding over the rugged ground with the seeming ease and celerity of a mountain goat. And as the strange being vanished from view behind a boulder, the trapper drew a long breath of relief.

"Ge—thunder! what a critter! Crazier 'n a bed-bug! 'D rather hev his room nor his comp'ny, any how, ef he *does* claim to be a fr'ind. Wonder—"

"What is the matter, Honest Hand?" called out Edna, at this juncture, having been drawn to the entrance by the strange sounds uttered by Death-Touch.

Nothin', little one," hastily replied the trapper. "Reckon thar's fightin' goin' on over thar, by the sounds."

"Fighting! can it be that our friends—"

"No; don't think that, little one," cried Honest Hand, as he entered the cave, carefully replacing the stone before the entrance. "I don't reckon we've got many fri'nds runnin' 'round loose in these parts. Most likely it's a muss atween the red-skins—the Sioux sometimes ranges in these diggin's. Reckon they've run ag'in Oolootcka's gang. 'F so, hope they'll just nat'rally eat each other up, hide and toe-nails."

"You were gone so long, I had begun to grow uneasy about you," said Edna, as she quenched her thirst.

"The spring run mighty slow, somehow. But thar. I reckon you'd better lay down now an' try to take a nap, so you'll be fresh an' bright fer a long tramp to-night. Lay down an' 'member 'at I'm watchin'. Thar cain't any danger come to you 'thout my knowin' of it."

"But you need sleep, too. Promise to awake me in a couple of hours. I can keep guard, then, while you sleep."

"S'pose the red-skin's 'd come—what 'd you do?" asked Honest Hand, smiling kindly upon the eager, upturned face.

"I could shoot at them, and that would awaken you."

"I b'lieve you would do it, too! You're a parfict image

o' your father, only littler an' prittier an' fairer to look at. But thar—go lay down. I'll call you when I git sleepy," and Edna, who, now that her hunger and thirst were appeased, could scarcely keep her eyes open, nestled down upon the dry, cosy bed of leaves and moss, and was almost instantly lost in slumber.

Honest Hand seated himself close to the entrance, after pushing the stone aside a little and arranging it so he could command a view of the trail below over which the enemy must pass in order to gain the foot of the rock. Then cutting bits of dried meat from one of the strips, he munched leisurely away, apparently with mind completely at ease. But such was not the case. He had not a little to think of, and was puzzling his poor brain over a knotty problem.

Until the sudden appearance of Death-Touch, he had felt comparatively safe, not believing the man lived who could unite the trail he had so carefully broken. Yet one man had already done so, and why might not the outcast, Oolooteka, do as much? The Death-Touch had promised to help them. But could the words of a crazy man—for such he surely must be—be relied upon? Honest Hand inclined to the belief that such an ally would require nearly as close watching as any of the Blackfeet.

He felt tempted to awaken Edna and at once resume their journey; but then, as he remembered what she had passed through during the past fourteen hours, he knew that she could not stand a forced march without first having a good, sound rest. There was nothing to do but to wait as patiently as might be for the coming of night, and hope that the broken trail might baffle Oolooteka and his gang.

But in this hope Honest Hand was doomed to bitter disappointment. Edna had not been sleeping more than a couple of hours, when the old trapper dropped the pipe from between his teeth, with a curse, as he clutched his rifle and leaned forward, a fierce light filling his eyes. A dusky, half-nude figure was suddenly outlined against the gray rocks. The figure of a human being, though now bent forward until it assumed the position of a dog trailing by scent, differing only in its motions being more slow.

"At first glance Honest Hand recognized the figure. It

was that of Oolooteka, the outcast, the avenger of blood. He was slowly advancing, inch by inch, as it were, over the rocks, following a trail where trail there was none, at least, visible to human eyes. And as he watched, a peculiar thrill crept over the superstitious trapper.

"I've hearn say 't the varmint 'd sold hisself to the devil, but I didn't b'lieve it afore now. A blood-bound could ca'cely lift sech a trail—yit look at him!"

A few moments more showed Honest Hand that the outcast was not alone. Behind him, keeping some little distance back as though fearful of disturbing the trailer, were nearly a score of paint-bedaubed, villainous-looking Blackfeet.

"It'll be big odds a keepin' them all back, ef so be they *do* smell out the hole hyar. But they don't git our pelts 'ithout payin' big fer 'em. Thirteen shots an' a good butcher to fall back on. That 'counts fer more 'n hafe of 'em. Mebbe they'll sour on it afore then, ef I kin only pick off that or'nary Oolooteka fust."

Preparing his weapons and laying them where they could be quickly grasped in turn, Honest Hand awaited the result in breathless suspense. The Indians had now passed from view, though he knew that several minutes must elapse before they could reach the foot of the trail leading to his covert. He hoped that Oolooteka might be diverted by the trail he had left in going to and from the spring, for, though he had used the greatest caution, he could not have helped leaving fully as much trail as the one the outcast chief had been following. But then this hope was dissipated. His keen ear caught a faint, scratching sound, and he knew that some one was ascending the steep trail.

It was Oolooteka. He was upon the trail of the murderer of his idolized boy brave. Death alone could make him abandon it.

Honest Hand noiselessly cocked his rifle and rested the muzzle upon the rock before him. If the enemy actually ascended the slope, he knew that they could not help discovering the entrance to the cave. And knowing the importance of the first blow, he sternly resolved that death should be the portion of the first who attempted to gain foothold upon the narrow ledge before him.

The rustling, scratching sound ceased. All was still as death, without. Not a human being was in sight. And Honest Hand began to hope that the Blackfeet had passed on, misled by the fresher trail.

At this moment Edna began murmuring in her sleep, and, at first startled by the sudden sound, Honest Hand turned his head. But then the maiden was quiet, and he again glanced through the opening. Only with the greatest difficulty did the old trapper suppress the exclamation that rose to his lips. During the moment his gaze had been averted, it seemed as though a human head had grown up through the white rock. A head with matted hair, mingled with dyed feathers; a face painted black as midnight, with eyes that glowed and burned in their deep sockets like living coals.

Honest Hand recognized the head and face. It was that of Oolooteka, who had crept up to the ledge, and whose eyes were even now riveted upon the flat rock that concealed the cave entrance.

Discovery seemed inevitable, and the old trapper did not hesitate. Glancing quickly along the leveled tube, he touched the trigger. A sharp report—a puff of blue smoke; and through the hazy veil he eagerly peered.

Simultaneous with the report, Oolooteka leaped up and forward, alighting fairly upon the rock-ledge with the skillful grace of a professional gymnast. His head was flung back, his arms uplifted, clutching rifle and hatchet; his lips were parted as though to give utterance to the wild war-whoop that would urge his braves on to the feast of blood.

But this was only a spasmodic action of the muscles. At that short distance, a far less skilled marksman could not have wasted his bullet. A few drops of black blood were trickling down from the round hole in the outcast's forehead. Mingled blood and brains were streaming down his back, from the ghastly hole made by the bullet as it crashed through the skull to expend its remaining force upon the rocks beyond.

With an ear-piercing yell, horrible in its intensity of hatred and baffled vengeance, the outcast sprung into the air, and toppling backward, fell heavily over the edge of the ledge.

The spell was broken. A series of blood-curdling shrieks and screeches arose from below, and mingling with them came a little cry from Edna, whose rest was thus suddenly broken.

"Don't be skeered, little one," cried Honest Hand, raising his voice until it could be heard above the pandemonium without. "The Injuns hev smelled us out, but they hain't got us yit. Jest hunker down an' take it cool. I kin keep back a hull tribe from here, jest as easy. Thar hain't a mite o danger—not a mite!"

Though he spoke so confidently, Honest Hand was far from feeling assured that he could make his words good. The odds were heavy. Oolooteka's band was composed of the offscourings of the country, but their reckless courage could not be denied. They seemed never to know when they were whipped, in this respect more nearly resembling white men than the generality of Indians, who seldom make an attack unless feeling confident of an easy victory. And now, maddened by the death of their chief, he knew the outcasts would not be easily repulsed.

He did not attempt to reload his rifle. He could hear the quick scratching of moccasined feet upon the steep trail, and knew that he would not have time for that. He must depend upon the brace of revolvers. And pushing the flat stone a little further away, that he might have a fair view of the ledge, he stearily awaited the result.

Not for long. The echoes of Oolooteka's horrible death-yell had scarcely died away among the rocky crags, when a bronzed face showed above the ledge, a knife clinched between the white teeth, the eyes burning with the lust of revenge. But they were speedily quenched in death. The revolver muzzle covered the brave ere his shoulders could be raised above the escarpment, and the leaden pellet, true to its master's will, sent the brawny brave headlong down the steep trail, his spirit taking up the last trail to join that of the chief gone before.

Nor did this check the mad rush of the infuriated Black-feet, and Honest Hand was fully employed. So rapidly did his revolvers speak that it resembled file firing rather than the work of a single man. The hot smoke lay heavily before the cave-entrance, and half the time he was unable to

take any aim. Yet scarce a bullet was wasted, so recklessly did the outcast band press forward, eager to avenge the death of their chief.

But fortune did not desert the bold trapper. As frequently happens, the Blackfeet abandoned the victory that was almost within their grasp. The unceasing hail of bullets that tore through their ranks caused them to believe they had run blindly into an ambush, and with a simultaneous yell of dismay and chagrin, the survivors rapidly retreated, pausing not until they were safely concealed amid the rocks below. Yet when they did so, Honest Hand had but two loads remaining. Ten seconds more would have left him at their mercy. Truly Providence was watching over him and his helpless charge!

"Whipped, by the 'tarnal!" and the old trapper's wild laugh rung out shrilly. "Whooray fer our side! Little one, yer all right? Speak, fer—"

"Yes, I am unharmed—but you?" faltered Edna.

"Sound es a beaver—nary a tetch. I reckon I did most o' the shootin'. The imps acted like crazy bedbugs, an' didn't do nothin' but yell an' scrouge. They—"

Honest Hand was suddenly interrupted by a loud yell from below, and peering out, he discerned a number of men dashing along over the rocks, nearing the hill. A fierce curse broke from his lips.

"H—ll thar comes that durned Watkins an' a thousan' more Injuns! I reckon our goose 's cooked now!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL OF DEATH.

THOUGH George Howard seriously doubted the prudence of his comrade's resolve, he was not a man to desert a friend because of danger to himself. And so he kept close at the heels of Harle Manning, who was steadily following the Indians at whose head glided Watkins and Oolooteka.

Though trailing a force full twenty times their number, the

young scouts in reality were running little danger, as long as they could control their eagerness and be content to keep at a safe distance in the rear. The truly munificent reward offered by the ex-trader for the recapture of Edna Allen, had created a sensation among the Blackfeet, and each brave meant to do his utmost to win the prize. They gave little thought, then, to what was passing behind them.

Neither Watkins nor Oolooteka suffered the energy of the savages to lag, but pressed on in hot haste up the valley, the one eager to regain the fair prize for which he had plotted and sinned so deeply, the other secretly dreading lest some harm should come to his idolized boy-brave, at the hands of his sworn enemy, Honest Hand. The young scouts were forced almost into a run, to avoid being distanced. It was utter recklessness on their part, and discovery seemed almost inevitable.

But then, as the minutes passed on, Harle Manning gradually regained his usual good sense and clear-sightedness, and realized the folly of his course. To be discovered now meant death. And then the fate of Edna Allen—for he firmly believed that the pale squaw mentioned by Watkins was none other than the maiden whom he had mourned as dead—would be sealed. With no friends to assist her, she must fall into the clutches of the renegade Watkins, from whom, as the bitter enemy of her parent she need expect but scant mercy.

Observing more caution, though still graduating their pace by that of the Indians, the young scouts took advantage of such cover as the scattered brush and bowlders would afford, keeping a keen look-out to guard against stumbling upon some straggling red-skin.

The squaw left them as they passed the curious hole in the wall. Oolooteka and Watkins led the way. The old chief saw with pride how well his boy-brave had performed his duty. Here was a crushed and broken branch of a bush or young sapling; here, where the starlight shone fairly upon a white rock, were several rude figures smeared upon the flat surface with moistened gunpowder; or else a couple of sticks thrust into the ground and crossed, told its plain, significant tale. And all this had been done without arousing the suspicions of Honest Hand, himself one of the keenest, surest

and most skillful scouts of the Northwest. Well might the outcast be proud of his son.

All at once the Indians seemed greatly excited, crowding around a particular spot, jabbering eagerly. The young scouts crouched behind a clump of bushes, puzzled and ill at ease. What discovery had been made? The fugitives had not been overtaken, else there would have been a yell of exultation.

"Lost the trail, I reckon," muttered Howard. "If so, we're in a nice box I *don't* think! The varmints'll be snooping around here, and can't help routing us out. Then it's good-by John—they'll swallow us without pepper or salt!"

"Back, then—we can get to the rocks yonder by keeping under cover. If they find us, we must make the best fight we can," hurriedly replied Manning.

"They won't have much to brag on, when they get through. I reckon we can keep 'em from going to sleep for a few minutes, anyway," coolly added Howard, as he imitated his comrade, keeping under cover of the bushes and boulders, adroitly working his way to the high rocks that lined one side of the valley.

Gaining a position where they could be attacked only in front, the two scouts crouched down side by side and peered curiously out upon their foes. The cries of the latter had ceased now, and they were gathered together, intently watching the motions of Oolooteka, who was slowly quartering the ground as though seeking to gain a lost scent.

He had come upon the spot where Honest Hand had ambushed the secret trailer, and the little pool of coagulated blood revealed by the gray light of dawn told the old chief that here a tragedy had been enacted. Though degraded, an outcast from tribe and kindred, Oolooteka was a father and possessed a father's feelings. For a moment his heart sickened and he feared to search further, lest he should come upon the mangled corse of his only son. But then, choking down this fear, he kept on, tracing out the blood drops, one by one, that had fallen from the body as Honest Hand carried it on until he could find a proper spot in which to give it burial.

Then came the wild, thrilling yell that told Honest Hand the outcast father had found his dead child, followed by a

long, low wail of heartrending grief. But only one—then the outcast, outwardly, was stern and cold as iron.

At the yell, the Blackfeet had hastened forward, and now were all beyond view of the scouts. The young men interchanged glances. They were puzzled and perplexed.

"I'm going out to see what all this means," at length said Manning. "Any thing is better than this suspense."

"Your hair must sit mighty uneasy on your head," muttered Howard; then adding, resignedly: "But I won't go back on you now. You take the wheel; I'll play roustabout."

Manning crept cautiously forward, and soon gained a point from whence he could peer down upon the Blackfeet. They were gathered around a small, motionless figure lying at the base of the huge boulder. Oolooteka was addressing them, in an even, quiet voice. Then he turned and glided away, his head bent low, his eyes reading the mute language of the rocks and stones. The Blackfeet gently replaced the body beneath the boulder and piled up the stones before it. Then they slowly followed on after their chief.

For an hour or more the young borderers trailed the trailers, though the task grew more and more perilous as the sun rose higher, lighting up every hollow and ravine. Only to the fact that the Indians believed their only enemy was in front, fleeing from them, did they owe their lives. Scores of times a single glance cast backward by the savages must have resulted in discovery, as they crawled over the white rocks. But the end was nigh.

Harle Manning, who was in advance, suddenly flattened himself out behind a boulder, and by a quick gesture bade Howard imitate his example, who, as he obeyed, muttered:

"What's up now?"

"Hist—I'm afraid one of the varmints smells a mice. He turned around and looked straight at me. I believe he's coming back now," hurriedly breathed Manning.

"If we've got to fight the lot, that rock just back there'll be the best place for it. Hist! I can hear his footsteps!"

In truth one of the hindmost Blackfeet had casually glanced back, and detected Manning, who was then just gliding behind a small boulder. The glimpse was but momentary and though his curiosity was aroused, the Blackfoot was far from

suspecting the truth, rather believing that their passage had aroused some wild animal from its covert among the rocks and stones. As Oolooteka had forbidden any one to advance faster than he picked up the trail, the brave had nothing more important to do than to satisfy his curiosity, and turned back to see what manner of game it was his quick eye had noted. He said nothing to his comrades, nor did he look particularly to his weapons, supposing the animal was a wolf, or something else beneath the weapons of a brave upon the war-path.

The savage abruptly paused and threw forward the muzzle of his rifle; but he did not fire. Death was too speedy.

A quick report broke the still air, and from the little cloud-breath of smoke that half veiled Harle Manning's face, a leaden pellet of death winged its way to find a resting-place in the red-man's brain.

The shot, the shrill yell of agony that broke convulsively from the lips of the red-skin brave, was the first intimation the Blackfeet had of trouble. Then, as they turned, amazed, they beheld two lithe figures darting swiftly over the rocks as though in full flight. They recognized the garb of the pale-faces. That was enough. With wild yells of hatred they swarmed over the rocks and boulders. And foremost was Oolooteka, the outcast, his features distorted, his eyes filled with the lust of blood and vengeance.

Harle Manning, seeing that discovery was inevitable, had cocked his revolver, holding it ready for use. He lay still, not daring to raise his head to reconnoiter, until he could quite distinctly hear the cat-like footfall of the curious Indian. Then he looked up, only to see the Blackfoot start and handle his rifle, while discovery shone in his eyes.

Manning had scarce time to take air, and it was Providence that guided the bullet, rather than his own skill. Then, shouting to Howard to follow, he sprung up and darted swiftly along the back trail. He was not so foolish as to dream of seeking escape by flight. He knew that neither he nor George could cope with the agile Blackfeet on rock-racing. Few men can. The Kainna Blackfeet are as much at home among the rocks and crags as the "bighorn" itself.

Knowing that such an attempt would be certain destruc-

tion, he resolved to die, if die he must, like a man, fighting to the last. The Blackfeet should boast of no tame victory. He would carve his epitaph in letters of blood.

"Back to the high rocks!" he shouted as he sprung to his feet. "We can make a fight there."

The Blackfeet, headed by Oolooteka, dashed furiously around the little point of rocks; a short cry escaped their lips, and they involuntarily recoiled as two of their number sunk to the rocks, writhing and gasping in the throes of death.

The pale-faces were before them, standing at bay. Two men defying two score. A course so different from their own nature, aroused their suspicions. Perhaps there was an ambush, and these two braves were only the decoy. Unless they felt assured of support, no sane men would so coolly face such odds.

Their hesitation was almost changed to a panic by the strange action of their leader. Oolooteka, who had been in advance, turned short upon his heel and strode swiftly through the close-crowded ranks of his braves. At first the Indians believed he was fleeing, but then they caught his words in time to resist the inclination many of them felt of fleeing. He bade them kill the pale-faces. They were not those who had made the trail.

The outcast now had only one object in life; vengeance upon the slayer of his son. All other enemies were as naught to him while that duty remained unperformed. And as soon as he saw that Honest Hand was not one of the two men standing at bay, he at once returned to his trailing.

"Look! the varmints are cowed?" and George Howard laughed shrilly as he picked off a second brave, with as much coolness as he would have displayed in practicing upon the flocks of geese and brants that line the sandy bars of the Missouri.

"Give 'em the best you've got!" gritted Harle Manning.

Their position had one advantage. The enemy could only attack them from directly in front and upon one side. The other flank and back were shielded by the high rocks. But this was their only cover. The ground before them, for nearly fifty feet was level and devoid of bushes or bowlders. They were wholly exposed to the aim of their enemy.

Neither of the scouts were foolish enough to expect to escape with their lives. That could scarcely be. But they resolved to sell their lives dearly—to inflict all the damage they could before going under. And with this resolve, their pistols spoke rapidly.

Manning had frequently been under fire before, and such a contest was nothing new in his experience. He was cool and collected, making every shot tell, never firing until the silver drop covered a victim. Howard acted nobly. It was his baptism of fire, yet he nearly equaled Harle in nerve and steadiness. The two formed an awkward antagonist even for the two score Blackfeet.

The hesitation of the red-skins was brief. The sight of their comrades falling like autumn leaves around them, the sight of their dying agonies, together with the mingled smell of burning powder and fresh blood, fired their worst passions. Yelling madly they swarmed forward, discharging their rifles and arrows. And then—a cloud of sulphurous smoke settled over the tragic scene.

There were fierce yells and shouts, curses and groans, the sharp reports of fire-arms and the metallic clashing of steel. But the contest was brief. How could it be otherwise with such disparity of force?

A puff of wind parted the smoke-cloud. The Blackfeet were swarming over the spot where the two scouts had so recently stood at bay. One brave was just swinging a gory scalp above his head, with a devilish yell of triumph. A stalwart white man was crouching over a prostrate form, warding off the weapons of half a dozen Indians.

The scalp was that of George Howard, whose soul had gone to join “poor Tom.” The bleeding, prostrate figure was that of Harle Manning. The man who was shielding his life—Watkins, the ex-trader. For what? pity? mercy?

“Back!” he cried, sternly, in the Kainna dialect, as he turned aside a vicious thrust. “Back—would you have him die like a brave man that he may laugh at us in the spirit-land? Slay him now, and you will have to fight him there, as you have here. Better make a dog of him, and then there will be one more slave to wait upon you in the spirit-land.”

To any other appeal the infuriated Blackfeet would have

turned a deaf ear. Their loss had been severe. Half a dozen braves lay upon the ground dead or dying, and double that number had received more or less painful wounds. But this adroit speech checked their hands, and their weapons were turned aside. Watkins had gained his point.

Yet it seemed as though death had already claimed the young scout. His eyes were closed, his breath stilled. The dark blood flowed slowly from his head. His garments were lashed and stained with blood in a dozen places. But Watkins could detect a faint fluttering of the heart, and set about restoring the young man. Taking a flask from his pocket, he forced open the tightly clenched jaws and poured a portion of the amber-hued liquor down Manning's throat.

At this juncture a faint whistle came to the red-skins' ears, and they recognized the signal of their chief. Watkins glanced up and hastily ordered the majority of the Blackfeet to press on after Oolooteka, while the rest remained to look after the dead and dying. He was promptly obeyed.

Oolooteka had lost the trail at the point where there were two passages through the rock-piles, and fearing to lose valuable time, signaled to his braves. Selecting the most skilled he divided the party and thus made sure of not losing his prey.

It was not many minutes before Harle Manning opened his eyes, and stared wonderingly around him. For a moment he could not recall what had happened, but then it all came back to his memory like a flash, and he attempted to leap to his feet as he recognized the dark, ferocious faces around him. Then he knew he was a prisoner—that he was bound hand and foot.

"Easy, young fellow," chuckled a well-known voice close beside him. "You're an invalid now, so badly cut up that we've been obliged to tie you up to keep you from falling to pieces."

"Curse you, traitor—renegade—woman thief!" hoarsely muttered Manning, straining at his bonds until he felt faint with the rush of blood to the head.

Watkins chuckled again, rubbing his hands together in high glee. He appeared to find an exquisite pleasure in the impotent rage of the young borderer.

"You are complimentary—but I can stand it. If those who win are entitled to laugh, it's only fair that the losers should have the privilege of cursing, so enjoy yourself while you may. You haven't much time to lose. I am very sorry that our business is so pressing. I would like to cultivate your acquaintance more thoroughly. Besides, there is my charming bride—she would be delighted to see you, I doubt not. You remember her—the fair, bewitching Edna?"

"Thank God! she is beyond your reach!"

"How do you know—where is she?" cried Watkins.

"Where you can not find her—beyond your foul touch. You are foiled there, if you have triumphed over me."

"Bah! She will be in my arms before yonder sun sets. And then—but I leave the rest to your imagination. Enough that I will renew the love-lesson begun last night. I am very sorry that you can not be present to witness our delights. The fact is, dear friend, I'm seriously afraid you've got yourself into a bad box, with your hasty temper. These red-skinned gentlemen seem to think you are to blame for the death of their comrades, and have hinted at a little barbecue, with trimmings. They are very headstrong and I really do not feel able to argue the case with them. I fear you'll have to kick the bucket."

One of the savages stooped down and thrust a bleeding scalp into Manning's face. His heart turned sick as he recognized the long curling locks that poor George Howard had been so careful of. But he did not suffer the feeling to betray itself upon his countenance. He would not afford his captors that gratification. They might triumph over his body, but his spirit would defeat them yet.

Then a strange light flamed up in his eyes. As his ear pressed the ground, he could distinguish a faint sound—a sound that reminded him of what had transpired on the past night. A dull, sullen, rumbling roar.

For several seconds the Blackfeet did not appear to notice the rapidly increasing sound. But then, as a wild, weird figure bounded into view, drawing near with gigantic bounds, a cry of terror and dismay broke upon the air.

And then, like a destroying angel, the scourge of their race the dreaded Death-Touch, was among them.

CHAPTER IX.

SHOOTING THE RAPIDS.

DISCHARGING his rifle point-blank, blowing one of the terror-stricken savages through and through, the Death-Touch bounded into the midst of the Blackfeet, plying both knife and ax, uttering the same deep, guttural, roaring that had heralded his coming.

Wherever his blows fell, death followed. Nothing could resist the dreadful force of his arm. The Blackfeet seemed petrified with terror. Though they would cower as if involuntarily, at the dread being's approach, not one attempted to flee until the voice of Watkins, the renegade, broke the spell.

"Shika-manakopa—'tis the Shika-manakopa!"

Naturally superstitious, much intercourse with the red-skins had intensified this trait. He had heard much of this weird Death-Touch, though he had never met him until the night just past, upon the river bank. The weird being's extraordinary size, his wild appearance, his utter recklessness and contempt of danger as shown by attacking over two score fully armed braves, the ease with which he cut down and overthrew stalwart braves, all combined, proved too much for the renegade's nerves. He believed that this terrible scourge was something more than mortal—and hence his startling yell—'tis the Bad Spirit!

Following the example of their white chief, the surviving Indians broke and fled at full speed, more by chance than any reasoning process, taking a course that would finally carry them around to the portion of the band led by Oolooteka. For a few rods they were hotly chased by the Death-Touch, whose blood-dripping weapons each claimed another life before the rocks were gained. But then he turned around and strode back to the spot where the wondering Manning was lying.

The young scout was by no means wholly at ease as the huge creature bent over him and darted the crimsoned steel

toward his person. One who found such a ferocious delight in blood would scarcely hesitate as to the color of the skin beneath which it flowed. The thought was natural, and Harle scarcely realized the fact when he felt the stout thongs give way beneath the keen edge of the knife.

"You were in a tight place, young man," uttered the Death-Touch, in a deep, not unpleasant tone. "Lucky for you I have good ears, else you would be in a fair way of joining your comrade, yonder," and he nodded toward the mangled body of poor George Howard.

"I am grateful," said Manning, as he managed, though not without considerable difficulty, to arise to his feet. "I had given up all hopes, and nerved myself to die as becomes a true white man. But life is sweet, and I thank you for saving mine."

"It needs no thanks, since I was but carrying out the sole purpose of my life, by slaying these accursed heathen. But you are injured?"

"Only scratches, I believe," doubtfully replied Manning, as he felt of his person. "My head hurts worst—it seems split open."

"You had a narrow escape, friend. Half an inch lower and you would never have known what hurt ye. That was made by a rifle-bullet," said Death-Touch, as he examined the bloody furrow that was plowed through Harle's scalp.

Manning, feeling faint, caught up the flask of whisky that Watkins had dropped, and took a long draught. The fiery liquor seemed to replace the blood he had lost, and he felt more like his usual self. While he was thus engaged, Death-Touch was carelessly examining those who had fallen before the bullets of the scouts, as well as his own strong arm. A little exclamation caused Harle to look up from the revolvers he was reloading. The Death-Touch held up a scalp with long, curling yellow hair.

"It's the—that of my poor friend, yonder," said Harle, an uncomfortable choking in his throat.

"Maybe he will rest the easier for having it in the same grave with his body," and the wild man gently dropped the scalp upon the dead man's breast. "But who are you, and how came you here?" he added abruptly, turning to Manning

The young man hesitated a moment, then briefly told his story, adding that he believed the woman spoken of by Watkins was none other than his employer's daughter, who had been under his charge since leaving St Jo.

"So—you feel a deep interest in this maiden, then? How much risk would you run in order to do her a service?"

"I'd give my life to save her one moment's pain," replied the young scout, in a tone that could not be misunderstood.

"Good! I will put you to the test. Listen. The maiden you love, together with a true-hearted trapper, is now not more than three miles from this spot, in hiding. Wait—control yourself. I said they were in hiding, waiting for night, under cover of which they hope to make their way to Fort Union. But Oolooteka, the outcast, is on the trail of the man who slew his son. He is sure as a bloodhound, and the chances are that he will scent them out, careful as Honest Hand was with his trail. I saw the old man not half an hour since, and promised him my aid, if it was needed. Will *you* go with me?"

"Yes—at once!" eagerly replied Manning.

"Easy. If Oolooteka finds the retreat, we can't join your friends now. If he don't, there's no hurry, since it would be folly to attempt further flight until night. Then here is your friend—would you abandon his body to the wolves and buzzards?"

"The living demand our aid more than the dead. Suppose the red devils should discover this hiding-place and attack the old man? They would be murdered while we were loitering here."

"No. The old man is well armed and can defend the cave against a host, in the day time. I give you my word there is plenty of time. Come. Help me with the body upon my back. A brave man should rest in peace. If we bury him near here, these two-legged wolves will unearth him, if only to secure his scalp."

Silenced, though not convinced, Manning obeyed, and with the mangled body of poor Howard upon his broad shoulders, the Death-Touch led the way through the bowlders, over a difficult trail, Manning, weak from loss of blood, finding it no easy task to keep up with his strange ally.

He now saw that one of the stories that was told about the Death-Touch was false; that his only garments were made of Indian scalps rudely stitched together. The slayer did not scalp one of the fallen braves, leaving them as they died, even to their weapons.

For fully an hour they wound through the hills, Death-Touch seeming to select the easiest trail by instinct. Harle received short, curt answers to his questions, and soon relapsed into silence, as he saw his companion was not inclined to satisfy his curiosity.

"This is the place," said Death-Touch as he paused upon the brink of a deep canon, through which roared and foamed a narrow but powerful stream. "Get a heavy stone. With a weight at his heels, the body of your friend can rest quietly down there until resurrection day."

It was a peculiar burial. The mutilated corpse was allowed to slip over the edge of the canon, and borne down by the weight, sunk swiftly beneath the roaring, churning waters. And as he peered down at the bubbling spot where the body had vanished, a moisture dimmed the young man's eyes and a painful choking came up in his throat.

"God rest his soul!" muttered the Death-Touch. "He died like a brave man. May his future be peaceful as his grave is troubled above him!"

"He might have escaped—only I led him on. It was his friendship for me that caused his death," sadly said Manning. "I feel like a murderer!"

"Let the past go—there is enough trouble in the future without borrowing. And now that we have paid the last duty to the dead, we must think of the living. You said you would dare any thing to do your lady friend a service. Dare you descend this stream, in a bark canoe?"

"It would be certain death!" ejaculated Manning.

"There is danger, I admit, and plenty of it, yet not so bad as you seem to think. The passage *has* been made, and can again, by strong hearts and steady hands. We can—"

"Hark!" suddenly interrupted Manning.

A faint rifle-shot from below, followed by a chorus of yells. The problem was easily solved.

"You see? Your friends are attacked. That cuts off the

front entrance ; but there is another. Though not without risk, we can join your friends. Unless we do, they are doomed ; they must succumb sooner or later. Even if they knew just where the other hole was, they could not escape by it without my aid. Quick, young man—your answer? Will you trust all to me, or—”

“Lead on—I will dare any thing, just so you place it in my power to aid them—or even to die with her, if escape is impossible!” cried Harle, eagerly.

“Come, then—follow me,” and the Death-Touch led the way up stream with long, rapid strides, closely followed by the almost distracted lover.

“The firing has ceased!” uttered Harle, a few moments later. “We will be too late!”

“Not too late to avenge them, at the worst. But you need not worry. I know the place. Unless he was taken by surprise, Honest Hand could hold the cave against a thousand Indians. As we heard his fire-arms, we know he was upon the alert. Depend upon it, friend, we will find them alive and safe.”

The Death-Touch passed up the edge of the canon for nearly half a mile beyond the point where they had sunk the body of George Howard. Then, seizing upon some vines and sturdy creepers, he descended by their aid into a narrow crevasse that ran at right-angles with the river-bed, Manning following without hesitation, and then, when once feeling *terra firma* again, glanced curiously around him.

A narrow tongue of rock ran out into the boiling, bubbling torrent, raised nearly a yard above the water's level. This, with the bare rocks of many hues and the dark-green foliage of the vines and climbers, was all that could be seen. No trace of a boat. Death-Touch smiled faintly as he noted the young scout's curious glance.

“You see I have learned to keep on the safe side, young man,” he said, carefully pushing aside a few drooping vines, and then removing a thin slab that had been carefully fitted into a hole in the rock. “This is my patent boat-house. Few Indians would think of searching here for a canoe, and still fewer would care to take a trip in it down that canon, for any stake less than life. Yet it has been the means of

saving *my* life more than once, besides adding not a little to my slightly unsavory reputation with the credulous heathen. But there—I so seldom find myself with a friend that my tongue is apt to run away with me when I once get started. The red-skins will dub me Squaw-tongue, first thing I know.”

“Why is it that you so seldom see friends? Surely you were not born to this life? You talk like an educated man—like one who had once lived in good society—”

“There—no more—unless you wish me to leave you alone to aid your friends as best you can,” hoarsely interrupted the Death-Touch, a sudden change coming over his face, his voice sounding hard and even menacing. “Some time I may tell you—not now. Take me as I am—not what I may once have been—and ask no questions unless you prefer my enmity to my friendship. There—no more.”

He quickly drew a light bark canoe and paddles from the hole, and launching the frail craft in the slight eddy just below the point of rock, motioned Manning to enter. The young borderer obeyed, and was promptly followed by his companion, whose strong arms wielded a broad-bladed, thick-handled paddle.

They shot out from the eddy and down the stream with the velocity of a race-horse, dancing and tossing like an eggshell upon the yeasty waters until Harle Manning closed his eyes and grasped the frail thwarts convulsively, his head whirling with the sickening dizziness of one who unexpectedly finds himself suspended over an almost fathomless abyss.

“Steady—keep trim!” came indistinctly to his ears above the infernal tumult of the waters, though Death-Touch raised his voice to a shout. “Careful, or you’ll upset the canoe!”

“It’s horrible! We go so fast I can’t see!” muttered Harle.

“Don’t watch the rocks—keep your eyes on the water and you’ll be all right. I thought just as you do, my first trip, only I had no boat. But listen and mark what I say. In less than two minutes we’ll be at our stopping place. Keep your eyes on the right hand side. When I shout *now*, you will see several pieces of knotted rope hanging from the rock. Grasp one of them, and hang on like grim death. You comprehend?”

"Yes. But speak loud; the water roars so."

Swift as the flight of an arrow was the passage of the frail bark down the canon, yet not for one moment was it beyond control of the giant, whose strong arm and broad paddle carried the dancing craft clear of the foam-crested boulders that here and there showed above the roaring torrent. So swift that one could not gaze upon the almost perpendicular wall, without growing blindly dizzy.

"Now!" shouted the Death-Touch, as he guided the canoe close to the dripping rock, to touch which at that frightful rate of speed seemed little less than suicide.

Manning was on the look-out and clutched at one of the knotted ropes that hung from the wall. At the same moment the Death-Touch did the same, and the canoe closely hugged the rock.

"Draw yourself upon the platform," shouted the giant.

Manning obeyed, abandoning the canoe for the narrow ledge of rock. Then Death-Touch allowed the rope to slip slowly through his hands, and a moment later the canoe was dancing in a little cove or eddy below the point upon which Harle stood.

Stepping out, the giant lifted his boat upon the ledge. Then he drew a coil of horse-hair rope from the stern. Motioning the young scout to stand back, he whirled the coil swiftly around his head, then lanced it high above him. The noose settled over a projecting point. A sharp tug showed the lasso was securely fastened.

"I'll go first, to show you the style, friend," said Death-Touch, as he swung the rifle over his back, and, his hands thus free, grasping the knotted rope he drew himself up hand over hand with wonderful ease and rapidity, then catching the rock-point, swung himself over and upon the second ledge.

At a gesture, Manning imitated his example, though it was a long, hard struggle. He was greatly weakened by loss of blood, hunger and fatigue.

"Next time do you loop the rope around your waist. I'll draw you up; you can help with your feet against the rocks," said Death-Touch, as he prepared for another cast.

The third ledge was more speedily gained, the giant back

ing the young man up seemingly with the greatest of ease. And thus they proceeded from ledge to ledge until at the seventh, or nearly two hundred and fifty feet above the roaring torrent.

"There's only one more; then we come to the place where we enter the cave. Are you ready?"

Manning, panting, breathless, nodded assent. Though dreading the worst, he could not think of rest until at their journey's end. Any thing was preferable to this killing suspense.

Passing on to the eighth and last one of the gigantic steps, Death-Touch carefully wound the lasso around his waist, tying the ends securely. As he said, without this friend, they too would be penned up in the cave without means of escape.

"Now we'll enter," said Death-Touch, nodding toward a narrow crevice in the rock that, even when viewed from a point within arm's length, seemed to end abruptly. "You can hold on to my robe. Eye-sight can avail you little in there, but I know the road. Come now; and remember, be cautious. The old man may take us for enemies and give us a warm reception unless we are careful."

Entering the crevice, which presently made a sudden turn and widening, extending in an almost direct line through to the opposite side of the range, the two adventurers paced slowly on for what seemed an age to the hot-blooded scout. Then Death-Touch paused, and pressing Manning low down, as he stooped himself, called out in a clear, but subdued tone:

"Honest Hand, we are friends, come to your assistance. You remember I bade you expect me. I have a friend here, also. One who is known to the young lady—"

"Edna—my darling! for the love of God tell me that you are safe!" cried Manning, unable longer to control himself.

"Harle—Harle!" came the gasping reply, and then, despite the darkness, the lovers were fast locked in each other's arms.

"I reckon it's all right," a little doubtfully muttered Honest Hand. "It's you, too, is it, stranger?"

"Yes. I told you I would come. When I left you so suddenly, I went back and had a little brush with the accu-

ed Blackfeet, who had cornered this young man and his friend. I saved him, but the other was dead. Then we made a circuit and hearing you firing, knew that we could not hope to enter by this side. So we took the back door, and here we are."

"Not too soon, neither. Thar's a lot more o' the varmints jest come up, led by that cussed renegade, Art. Watkins. I reckon they're jest mad enough to hev another try fer us in nyar, an' its ruther sharp work fer one pa'r o' hands."

"Let them come. One more sharp repulse and they'll be ready to sit down and try to starve us out. And when night comes we'll give them the slip and—"

The giant's words were cut short, ending in a hollow groan. The cave was lighted up by a sudden flash and an explosion as of thunder rent the air. With a deep groan the Death-Touch reeled forward, then fell heavily upon his face.

Shrill yells arose from without and strong hands tore at the flat rock, hurling it aside, revealing the entrance. The ledge was fairly swarming with Blackfeet.

CHAPTER X.

"RUBBED OUT."

"Up an' give 'em glory, young feller!" yelled Honest Hand as his rifle sounded the death note of a Blackfoot.

At the report and terrible yells, coming so unexpectedly, Edna Allen had flung her arms around her lover's neck in an ecstasy of terror, and Harle Manning found it no easy task to free himself without using positive violence. But the circumstances did not admit of much ceremony, and removing the clinging arms from his neck, the young scout leaped forward to assist Honest Hand in defending the entrance.

If the savages had been reckless before, they were doubly so now. Having torn the flat rock away, they endeavored to enter the cave. Their very ardor proved fatal to their hopes. They jammed and crowded up the entrance so that neither could force an entrance.

And the revolvers of Honest Hand were playing rapidly upon the crowded mass at such short range that more than one gorgeous scalp-lock was singed with the burning powder. It was a slaughter pen. Blood flowed like water. The entrance was choked up with dead or dying braves. And all this in a score of seconds, while Harle was freeing himself from Edna's trembling grasp.

The glory of the repulse belonged solely to Honest Hand. Before Manning could cock his revolver, it was over. The hope of the Blackfeet had been a surprise, when one stout rush would bear the old trapper down. And when that rush failed—when so many of their dead had fallen before the entrance as to close it entirely, the survivors desisted, yet, in obedience to their teaching, each brave seized upon a leg or an arm and dragged their dead with them.

"Stiddy, young feller!" warningly cried Honest Hand as Manning pressed forward. "It may only be a trick. Don't show yourself outside yit. Keep ready wi' your barkers while I load up. I don't reckon we've seed the last o' it yit."

"I guess they've soured on it," muttered Harle.

"Mebbe—but thar's no use in running resks. But say—who was it fell a bit sence—not the little one?"

"No—she was not hurt. The stranger—I fear he is killed."

"I'll take a look to him, in a minnit. We're in a trap ef he's rubbed out. Themimps 'll starve us out, sence he only knows the way out o' this cussed hole."

"Except me. We came in by it, you know."

"Shore enough I reckon I'm gittin' looney. St—!"

A variety of signals came from without, some faint, others quite distinct. Despite his knowledge of Indian ways and stratagems, Honest Hand could not interpret these signals to his satisfaction. Yet, feeling sure that mischief was brewing, he again cautioned Manning, then crept back to where lay the motionless form of the stranger.

Bending over the prostrate figure of the Death-Touch, Honest Hand gently passed his hands over the body to discover the wound if possible. Eye-sight availed but little in the gloomy cave, unless in looking at something outlined against the light without.

A little cry broke from the scout's lips, as his hand rested upon the Death-Touch's head. The long hair was wet and sticky. Honest Hand knew that this was blood.

"What is it, old man?" quickly asked Manning.

"He's rubbed out—chugged kersplunt through the head. He's laid out his last Blackfoot," quietly replied the veteran. "Lucky you know the road out."

"I do know it, but we needed his strong arms to help us down—it will be a fearful strain. But hark!"

A loud call came from without. It was the voice of a white man, and as they listened, the besieged distinguished the words:

"Hellow in the cave! you Honest Hand!"

"It's that renegade Watkins!" muttered Manning, his eyes glowing, his fingers tightening upon his revolver-butt.

"You keep still; he don't know thar's any one in hyar but little one an' me. 'Twon't do no harm to see what the cuss wants. Hellow yourself an' see how ye like it! What ye want, anyhow?" replied Honest Hand, raising his voice so as to be heard without.

"Step outside—want to have a talk with ye. Mayhap we can come to terms."

"Not so green, thankee. 'F you want to see me so bad, jest step up hyar. The front door's open, an' we'll let ye come in, ef ye promise to be a good boy an' not quarrel."

"I give you my word of honor that you shall not be harmed, if you step out so we can see you," persisted Watkins.

"I know 'tain't perlite to doubt a gentleman's honor, 'specially one so high-toned as *you* be, Art. Watkins, but 'pears like I'd rather be excused."

"All right then—if you prefer splitting your throat to talking at ease. What do you intend doing about this?"

"'Bout what?"

"I mean the girl. Give her up, and you can go free. The Blackfeet are very angry, for you have killed a dozen of their braves, but I can promise that you shall not be molested, if you only give up the girl. Refuse, and we will attack you again, this time in sober earnest, and put you to the worst

tortures we can invent. Now don't be a fool and throw away your only chance of life."

"It's lucky fer you, you or'nary red nigger wi' a white hide that I ain't out whar I could see ye, or that speech 'd cost ye a hole in your hide that wouldn't be easy mended. I reckon you take me fer a dirty, no-count, woman-stealin' half-an'-half renegade like y'rself. The gal is hyar—ef you want her bad, I reckon you'd better come an' take her. As I told ye afore, the door is open, an' all you've got to do is to walk over this beaver."

"Then you refuse to deliver her over?"

"I said so—isn't that aplenty?"

"All right, I didn't expect you would do it. I only asked to satisfy the red-skins here. Now I've got one more thing to say. You ain't a fool. You know that we can rout you out, if we stick to it long enough. But before that, you could rub out a good many of us. That isn't so agreeable. We have already lost nearly half our band, what with the fight and explosion of the steamboat, the brushes with that accursed Death-Touch and our attacks on you. The fact is, we've got just about enough of it—there's too much sugar for a cent. Now we will go away and leave you in peace, on one condition. If you refuse, then we'll try if we can't bring you to terms by an attack. What say ye?"

"What's the condition, fust?" demanded Honest Hand.

"Well, when we left in such a hurry, just now, we forgot to carry off two of our dead braves. They're lying upon the ledge there, somewhere. The Blackfeet say that if you will roll them down here, with their scalps untouched, they will go off and let you alone. But mind—if you scalp them first, t's no bargain."

The two scouts interchanged quick glances. Neither of them appeared to place much reliance upon the words of the renegade. The same doubt occurred to both.

"There's some trick under this," muttered Manning. "But what is it? Does he want us to expose ourselves to a shot from below?"

"'Spect he would like it—but I reckon he must know we kin push the karkidges over 'ithout showin' so much as a hair to any varmint 'ithin rifle range. 'Tain't that, then. I

think he's lookin' further ahead. This is the way I read the sign.

"The varmints has tried twicet to git in hyar, an' paid big fer the fun, 'ithout makin' any thin'. They hain't quite fools. They must know we hain't got no gre't stock o' grub an' water hyar. Hunger an' thirst 'll kill a feller as sure as lead or steel, though mebbe not quite so suddent. I reckon they mean to squat down thar an' starve us out. As fer thar goin off an' leavin' us, don't you think it. He was lyin', thar shore."

"But the bodies—what did he mean by that?"

"A part o' what he said an' a good deal more, too. It's nat'ral they'd like to git them back wi' whole skelps. But they won't slide off, jest 'cause we give 'em up. He said that, mebbe, in hopes it'd throw me off my guard, when time went on an' I didn't see nor hear nothin' of 'em. They'll jest lay low an' wait until I'm starved out or 'tempt to slip off; then they'll light down on me, heavy."

"Perhaps we can fool *them*. The bodies do us no good, nor do we care for the scalps. Suppose we shove them over? I'll do it—you hold my pistols."

"Wait—no hurry. I kin do it better than you, fer I know how the rock lays an' you don't. Say, you red nigger down thar!" he added, raising his voice.

"You'll spare your breath, old man, by not calling me out of my name. You may repent it yet. But what is it?" replied Watkins.

"You sw'ar you'll leave ef we send you down the kar-kidge o' your fri'nds?"

"If they are not scalped—yes."

"We ain't goin' into the piznin'-o'-wolves bizness, so we don't want the pelts. You're welcome to 'em. I'll roll 'em over to ye, fer they won't smell nice when the sun comes to-morrow. I know what you're thinkin'. You think I'll step into your trap. Don't I know you're lyin', when you say you'll leave? But that's all right. We've got a wagon load o' grub hyar, an' water enough to put out a prarie fire, an' 'd jest as soon spend a month hyar as not."

"Believe it or not, just as you choose, just so you save us the trouble of coming up after our friends. We've got more

important business on hand, and can't spare the time to starve you out. Will you send them down?"

"Take it cool, you'll live longer for 't. You shell hev the car'on 'fore 'long," said Honest Hand, then adding in a whisper: "Young feller, keep your eye skianed now. Thar *may* be some trick in it, though I don't think it. I'm goin' out thar."

But Honest Hand did not neglect proper precaution. He cautiously peered forth from the cave, and soon discovered a couple of bodies lying upon the ledge side by side. Nothing could be seen of any red skins below. All seemed fair and above board. He removed his weapons, only holding a knife betwixt his teeth, and then stealthily crawled out of the cave, toward the bodies.

Closely hugging the rocks, he crept along until he was within arm's length of the bodies. It seemed an easy matter to roll them over the escarpment, and this was what Honest Hand endeavored to do.

But it seemed as though his touch was endowed with a marvelous power, for the apparent dead men sprung into life and activity, each brave clutching a tomahawk and knife. Taken utterly by surprise, the trapper lay at **their** mercy, and the weapons descended, wielded by arms fired with hatred and lust of revenge.

The wild, triumphant yells as the cunning Blackfeet attacked the trapper, was the first intimation Harle Manning had of the real state of affairs. And the exultant cries from Watkins and his allies below, told him that their *ruse* had succeeded.

Forgetting all save that the true-hearted old trapper was in difficulty, Manning pressed through the opening and discharged two shots in rapid succession. Though excited, he did not waste his bullets. Honest Hand was avenged.

Bleeding profusely, Honest Hand was not yet dead. He dragged himself forward, saying, huskily:

"Back inside—the varmints air comm' up!"

Harle too could hear the scrambling noise made by the moccassined feet as the Blackfeet hastily scaled the steep trail, but he would not desert the old man. Grasping him beneath the arms, he pulled Honest Hand inside, just as the foremost

savages gained the ledge. And then, with a revolver in either hand he defended the entrance.

But it was only for a few seconds. He was hurled heavily forward, his head coming in contact with a point of rock, half-stunning him, while a frightful roaring sound filled his ears.

Though the Blackfeet, believing their enemy had been either captured or slain by the two braves who had volunteered to enact the *role* of dead men, had swarmed up the hill until the ledge in front of the cave was crowded, they did not continue their attack with any thing like their former daring. The sight of their supposed victorious comrades lying dead, together with the two white men of whom they just caught a glimpse as they entered the cave, staggered them. And when the revolvers of Manning began to play, their astonishment was complete. They knew not what to think.

A deep, rumbling roar—a dark figure passing through the aperture; and then a simultaneous yell of horror broke from the savage crowd. The Death-Touch was upon them!

Though unarmed, the madman was irresistible. His huge arms worked like battering-rams. His long fingers closed around the throat of a brawny warrior, and with a quick twist broke his neck. Then the quivering body was whirled aloft and dashed against the cowering red-skins like a mammoth flail, sweeping half a dozen over the edge, where they rolled helplessly down the steep slope.

It was the work of a minute. Then the ledge was cleared. And with his last victim, Death-Touch stood upon the rock. Raising the shrieking, terror-stricken wretch aloft, he hurled him far out into the air. At the same moment he staggered back, clapping one hand to his breast. A sharp report echoed from below. It was the rifle of the renegade, Watkins.

The Death-Touch stooped and reentered the cave. Manning was just recovering from the blow he had received as the strange man leaped past him upon his hated foes.

"They will not attack us again for some time," said the Death-Touch, in a low, strangely subdued tone. "Now is our chance—come, let us improve it by escaping to the river."

"But you—we all thought you were dead!" muttered Harle confusedly, pressing one hand to his throbbing brow.

"Something struck me—and I only remember hearing the devils screech. Then I rushed forward. Maybe I am dead. I don't know. I feel very queerly—my head is light and seems floating in the air. But come—we're losing time!"

"Do's he says, young feller," faintly uttered Honest Hand. "But fust—I'd like to see the little one, an' hear her say she don't blame me fer all this trouble. God knows I did it fer the best. I wouldn't like to go under an' leave her feelin' hard ag'inst me."

"You are not hurt so bad, dear friend," sobbed Edna, creeping to the side of the trapper from the corner in which she had been cowering, half dead with terror.

"I've got my last gruel this time, little one. Thar—you ain't cryin' fer me? Don't—you make me feel like a fool squaw myself. You cryin' for me! a rough, no-count beaver—shaw! reckon I'm goin' loony!"

"Where are you hurt, old friend?" ventured Manning.

"Deep down in the hump ribs. They used thar weepins mighty lively fer a bit, an' I wasn't ready fer no sech. I kin feel it creepin' up—blood, I reckon. It'll choke me in a bit. Then you folks kin go. But little one, you'll tell the cap'n I did the best I knowed how? I'd like to see him ag'in, jest to say good-by. He made a man o' me—treated me like I was a brother—I loved him, like I was his pet dog. You'll tell him—ah—I'm chokin'—God hev mercy on me a zinner—good-by—little one—good—!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST SHOT.

"It is all over—he is dead!" solemnly uttered Death-Touch. "He died as he lived—true to his name and color. It was the death he would have chosen, after all."

"And only for me, he would have been still living," sobbed Edna.

"It was his fate. When he was born it was written so. But there. He is dead. We can do him no good by remaining here, and may lose our only chance of escaping. Come, I can aid you now; if you wait, I may not be able."

"Not able—your voice is changed greatly—you are hurt?" cried Manning.

"I believe I am—my head swims and I feel faint. But I'm strong enough to help the lady—and for her sake, I repeat, come on," added the Death-Touch a little impatiently, as he secured the weapons that would never more be used by their late master, Honest Hand.

"Come, darling, he is right. The Indians will not dare attack us again soon, and we must not neglect the chance. It will give us a start that will ensure our reaching Fort Union before being overtaken."

"Assist her, young man. Keep hold of my robe. You know the passage is dark and difficult," admonished Death-Touch.

The dark journey was made with a great deal more difficulty than when the two men were alone. Death-Touch seemed like one in a maze, or under the partial influence of a stupefying draught, forgetting the various angles, receiving several awkward knocks and stumbles. Then they emerged, standing upon the ledge, and Death-Touch began unwinding the lasso.

"Look at the blood!" gasped Edna.

"My God! man, you are bleeding to death!" cried Harle. The hairy garments of the Death-Touch seemed saturated

with blood. Wherever he stepped the blood lay in blotches. It was a sickening sight.

The Death-Touch turned toward them, smiling faintly. Then, holding the lasso in his hands, he knelt upon the edge, to secure the rope. A fit of coughing seized him, and a stream of blood burst from his lips. One hand was raised to his throat and then—

A half-stifled scream—a dull, sullen *thud*.

The Death-Touch toppled over and fell to the ledge below. Rebounding, his mangled, shapeless body sunk forever beneath the foaming, roaring waters.

Two nights and a day passed by. Edna Allen, the ghost of her former self, lay upon the bed of grass and leaves. Harle Manning knelt at the entrance, revolvers in hand. He could hear the foe scrambling up the slope. The crisis had come.

Twice he had repulsed them. But would he do so again? Hunger and thirst with loss of sleep had almost done their work. Yet, stern and pale, he awaited death.

A bearded face appeared at the opening. A sharp report, and the earthly trail of the renegade Watkins was forever ended. But the Blackfeet press on, determined to conquer. They drag aside their dead who block the entrance, and then Manning draws his knife, in desperation. He has fired his last shot.

But hark! That shout—a loud, clear cheer! The Blackfeet, even as victory seems within their grasp, pause in blank dismay. They know from what throats those yells proceed, and they turn to flee. A full score of rifles begin to play upon them. Few braves reach the level alive. And then only to fall beneath the vengeful blows of stalwart arms.

Manning staggers out upon the ledge. He recognizes friends—many of his old comrades at the fort. With a feeble cheer, he waves his hand. Then he sinks down, like one dead.

Old Jesse Roberts proved the victor in his struggle with the Indian, when they fell overboard. Knowing that all

was lost, he swam ashore and made the best of his way to the fort. Telling his tragic tale, a party was made up to avenge the massacred. They found the deserted goods, struck the trail and finally arrived just in time to foil the Black-feet.

With care and nursing, Edna and Harle were restored to health. And within six months from the massacre on the Metamora, there was a gay wedding at Fort Union.

Nothing further was ever learned concerning the past life of the Death-Touch. In death, as in life, he was an enigma.

Honest Hand was buried near the spot where he met his death, and a simple epitaph carved upon the huge boulder at whose foot he lies, records his name and virtues. Peace to his ashes.

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DIME DIALOGUES, NO. 3.

<p>The May Queen. For an entire school. Dress Reform Convention. For ten females. Keeping Bad Company. A Farce. For five males. Courtng Under Difficulties. 2 males, 1 female. National Representatives. A Burlesque. 4 males. Escaping the Draft. For numerous males.</p>	<p>The Gentee Cook. For two males. Masterpieces. For two males and two females. The Two Romans. For two males. The Same. Second scene. For two males. Showing the White Feather. 4 males, 1 female. The Battle Call. A Recitative. For one male.</p>
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DIME DIALOGUES, NO. 4.

<p>The Frost King. For ten or more persons. Starting in Life. Three males and two females. Faith, Hope and Charity. For three little girls. Darby and Joan. For two males and one female. The May. A Floral Farce. For six little girls. The Enchanted Princess. 2 males, several females. onor to Whom Honor is Due. 7 males, 1 female. Gentle Client. For several males, one female. Logy. A Discussion. For twenty males.</p>	<p>The Stubb'etown Volunteer. 2 males, 1 female. A Scene from "Paul Pry." For four males. The Charms. For three males and one female. Bee, Clock and Broom. For three little girls. The Right Way. A Colloquy. For two boys. What the Ledger Says. For two males. The Crimes of Dress. A Colloquy. For two boys. The Reward of Benevolence. For several males. The Letter. For two males.</p>
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DIME DIALOGUES, NO. 5.

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
Dat's wat's de matter,	All about a bee,	Latest Chinese outrage,	My neighbor's dogs,
The Miss asippi miracle,	Scandal,	The manifest destiny of	Condensed Mythology,
Ven te tide cooms in,	A dark side view,	the Irishman,	Pictus,
Dose lams vot Mary hal	Te pesser vay,	Peggy McCann,	The Nereides,
got,	On learning German,	Sprays from Josh Bil	Legends of Attica,
Pat O'Flaherty on wo-	Mary's shmall vite lamb	lings,	The stove-pipe tragedy
man's rights,	A healthy discourse,	De circumstances ob de	A doketor's drubbles,
The home rulers, how	Fobias so to speak,	situation,	The coming man,
they "spakes,"	Old Mrs. Grimes,	Dar's nuffin new under	The illigant affair at
Hezekiah Dawson on	parody,	de sun,	Muldoon's,
Mothers-in-law,	Murs and cats,	A Negro religious poem,	That little baby round
He didn't sell the farm,	Bill Underwood, pilot,	That violin,	the corner,
The true story of Frank	Old Granley,	Picnic delights,	A genewine inference,
lin's kite,	The pill peddler's ora-	Our c'ndidate's views,	An invitation to the
I would I were a boy	tion,	Dundreary's wisdom,	bird of liberty,
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